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BY
ANTHONY HOPE



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PHROSO

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The Story of an Island with a Secret

BY

ANTHONY HOPE

Abridged and Simplified by

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE

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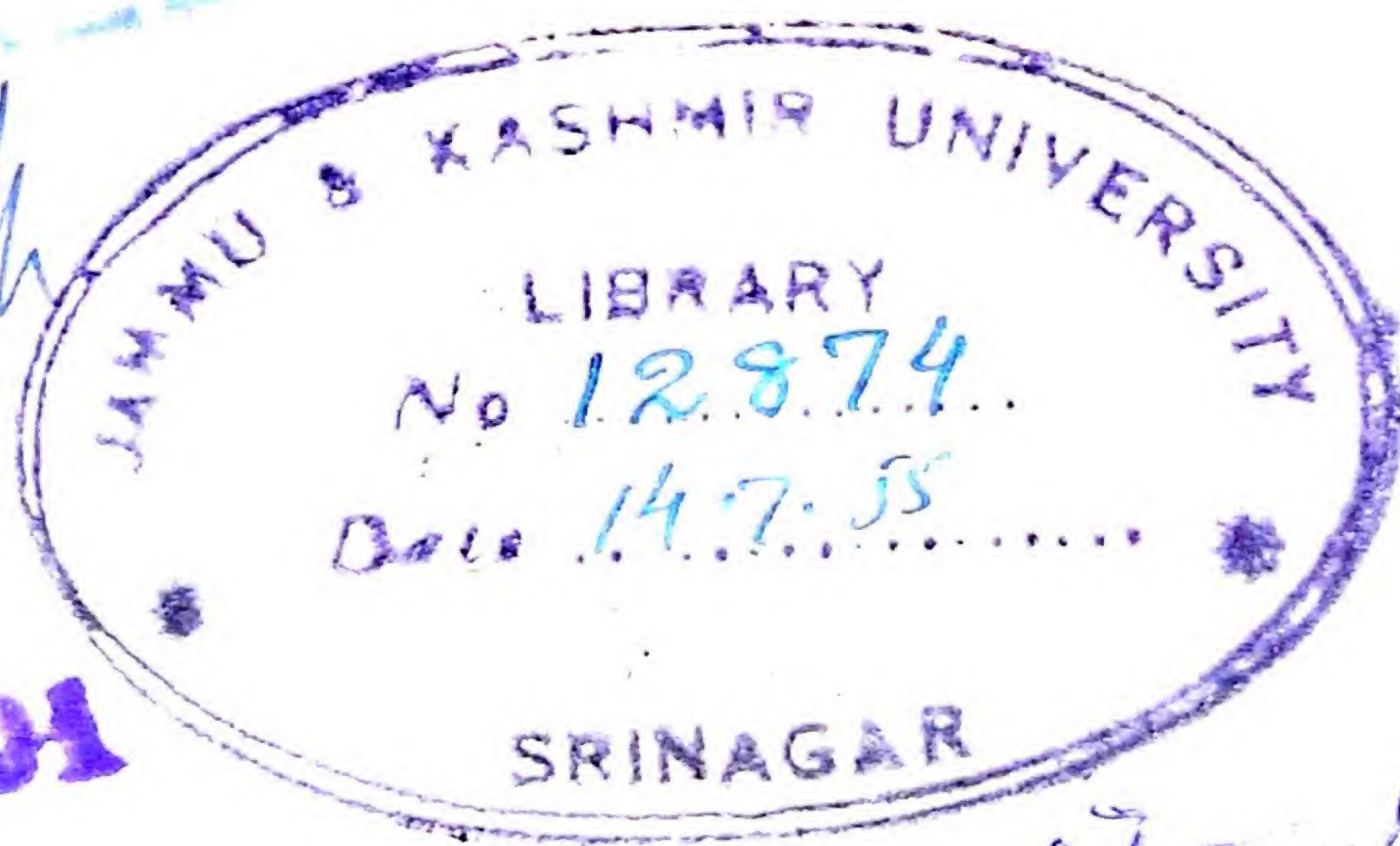
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CHAPTER I

I BUY AN ISLAND

FROM boyhood I had always longed to possess an island of my own. Now, when I was a grown man and engaged to be married, the moderate wealth, bequeathed me by a cousin, enabled me to realize my ambition. But Beatrice Hipgrave, the lady to whom I was engaged, declared emphatically that a 'horrid little island' had no charms for her, and that she would never set foot in it. This was discouraging, but I decided to have the island none the less.

For I had bought it. Its name was Neopalía, and I had bought it from Stefanopoulos, the old lord who ruled it. It cost me seven thousand, five hundred and fifty pounds, half to be paid to the lord's bankers in London, and half to him in Neopalía, when he handed over the island to me. The Turkish Government had sanctioned the sale, and I had agreed to pay a hundred pounds yearly as tribute. This sum I was entitled, in my turn, to levy on the inhabitants.

'In fact, Lord Wheatley,' said Mason, my lawyer, when I called on him, 'the whole affair is settled. Your island is over a hundred miles from Rhodes, the nearest land, and you are off the steamship tracks. You'll only get letters once in three months. Neopalía is extremely rugged and picturesque. It is nine miles long and five broad.'

'And there are only three hundred and seventy inhabitants,' I said.

'Yes. By the way, treat the old gentleman kindly. He's terribly distressed at having to sell the island. But he needs money on account of his son, who died recently. The son was a very bad lot, you know.'

'He left a heap of unpaid debts, didn't he?'

' Yes, gambling debts. He spent his time away from Neopalia with his cousin Constantine—by no means an improving companion. And your money is to pay the debts.'

' Poor old chap,' said I.

' Here's the house,' said Mason, turning to the map. ' About the middle of the island, nearly a thousand feet above the sea.'

' And I'm to have possession in a month ? '

' In a month—on the 7th of May.'

' All right ; I shall be there to take it.'

From Mason's office I went to a party at my sister's house. By good luck, the Turkish Ambassador was there, and I was introduced to him.

' You are the purchaser of Neopalia, aren't you, Lord Wheatley ? ' he asked. ' I'm sure I hope you'll settle in comfortably.'

' Oh, I shall be all right. I know the Greeks very well, you see—I have spent some time in those parts, and, of course, I talk the tongue.'

The Pasha stroked his beard, as he observed in a calm tone : ' The last time a Stefanopoulos tried to sell Neopalia, the people killed him, and turned the purchaser—he was a French baron—adrift in an open boat.'

' Good heavens ! Was that recently ? '

' No ; two hundred years ago. But in that part of the world customs change slowly. They think that the island is theirs, and that the lord has no business to sell it. However, I don't suppose you'll have any trouble. Certainly I hope not.'

A result of this conversation was that next day I purchased a couple of pairs of revolvers. I attached little importance to the by-gone outrage, but I thought it prudent to be ready for possible trouble.

My cousin, young Denny Swinton, was to dine with me that evening. He was wild with interest in the island, and I looked forward to telling him all I had heard. I knew he would listen eagerly, for he was to go with me. The

boy had been overjoyed when I asked him to come ; he was going into the Army, but for the next six months he was free, and he had persuaded his parents to let him go with me.

I found Denny at the restaurant, waiting impatiently for me.

We had reached the middle of our meal, and I was telling Denny about the murdered Stefanopoulos, when a man and a woman came in and sat down at the table next to ours. The man was tall and powerfully built ; his complexion was dark, and he had good regular features. The lady was handsome, and moved with much grace. When she spoke, I detected a distinctly foreign accent. I noticed both of them casting curious glances towards our table.

' I wonder if there's any chance of a row ! ' said Denny in a hopeful tone. ' Going to take anybody with you, Charley ? '

' Only Watkins, my man-servant. And I've told Hogvardt to meet us in Rhodes : he acted as my guide on my earlier journeys. He's German by birth, but he chatters Greek like a parrot. He's a pretty good man in a row, too. But there won't be a row, you know.'

' I suppose there won't,' admitted Denny regretfully.

I had forgotten our neighbours ; but now, during a pause in our conversation, I heard the lady's voice. She began a sentence—and began it in Greek ! Her companion cut her short, saying very sharply, ' Don't talk Greek : talk Italian.' He spoke in Italian. Now why shouldn't the lady talk Greek ? It would be as good a shield for secrets as most languages ; unless indeed I, who had some reputation for my researches in Greece, were regarded as a possible listener. Recollecting the glances which I had detected, I ventured on a cautious gaze at the lady. Her handsome face expressed a mixture of anger, alarm, and entreaty. The man was speaking to her now in low urgent tones, and she retorted, ' Enough ! I shall come too.'

She held up her hand before his eyes, and with the other hand pointed at a wedding ring on her finger.

‘Yes, yes, my dearest,’ said he, and he was about to say more, when, glancing round, he caught my gaze, before I could drop my eyes. I dared not look up again, but I felt his scowl on me.

‘And when can we get off, Charley?’ asked Denny in his clear young voice. I paused for a moment before replying, and there was silence at the next table also. It seemed to me that there too my answer was being waited for. Well, they could know if they liked; it was no secret.

‘In a fortnight,’ said I. ‘We’ll get there on the 7th of next month. We shall go to Rhodes. Hogvardt will have a little yacht ready for me there.’

While I was speaking, I saw two men I knew approaching. One of them was Bennett Hamlyn, a rich young man whom I had met several times at the Hipgraves’ house.

‘Are you going to dine?’ I asked, rising. ‘Take this table, we’re just leaving.’

Hamlyn was about to reply, but stopped while he returned a bow which our neighbour at the next table had bestowed on him, before following the lady who was already making for the door. I welcomed this chance to learn something about him.

‘Who’s your friend, Hamlyn?’ I asked, the man now being out of earshot.

‘He’s not a friend of mine,’ said Hamlyn. ‘I only met him once and then he won a big amount from me at cards. I believe he cheated.’

‘And what’s his name?’ said I.

‘I don’t remember,’ he replied. ‘I believe it’s a Greek name, a long one that ends in ‘poulos’—something like Constantinopoulos.’

‘It might conceivably,’ I said, ‘be Constantine Stefanopoulos.’

‘I believe that was it,’ he said. ‘Anyhow, the less you see of him, Wheatley, the better. Take my word for that.’

'But,' I objected, 'it's such a small place, that, if he goes, I shall be almost bound to meet him.'

'What's such a small place?' asked Hamlyn.

'Why, Neopalia, of course, my island,' said I. 'If he's the man I think, he comes from there.'

After that, we said good-night and Denny and I walked off together; as we went he observed:

'I suppose that chap Hamlyn's got no end of money?'

'Oh, yes, no end of it, I believe.'

'I notice that Beatrice and he are often together,' he remarked.

'Don't let's worry about that,' I suggested, taking his arm. I was not worried about it myself. Though I was engaged to Beatrice, we were not so deeply in love that I was ready to be jealous on slight grounds. I was fond of Beatrice, but we owed our engagement largely to Mrs. Hipgrave who considered me a suitable match for her daughter.

We were now on the steps outside the restaurant, and I stopped abruptly for I had just perceived a scrap of paper lying on the pavement. I stooped and picked it up. It was a fragment torn from the menu card. I turned it over.

'Hullo, what's this?' said I, and I read what was written on the back. It was in Greek, and it ran thus.

'By way of Rhodes—small yacht there—arrive seventh.'

I turned the piece of paper over in my hand. I drew some conclusions; one was that my tall neighbour was named Stefanopoulos; another that he had made good use of his ears; for a third, I guessed that he would go to Neopalia; for a fourth, I fancied that Neopalia was the place to which the lady had declared she would accompany him. Then I fell to wondering why he wished to remember the route of my journey, the date of my arrival, and the fact that I meant to hire a yacht.

The general result of the evening was to increase most distinctly my interest in Neopalia. When I went to bed

I was still thinking of my purchase, and the last thing which came into my head before I went to sleep was, 'What did she mean by pointing to the wedding ring?'

Well, I found an answer to that later on.

CHAPTER II

A STRANGE WELCOME

UNTIL the moment of our parting came, I had no idea that Beatrice Hipgrave felt any distress at my going. I was surprised at the apparent reluctance with which she bade me good-bye. She blamed herself, saying that if she had been kinder to me I should never have thought about my island, and persisted that she was unworthy of me and did not deserve my love. I attempted to soothe her, and even offered to put off my expedition until after our wedding. She begged me to do nothing of the kind, but she implored me always to think well of her, and asked if I were really attached to her. I declared warmly my confidence in her, and I gave a solemn promise that she might rely on my faithful affection.

When I left her, I was in some perplexity, for I could not understand her state of mind, and I blamed myself for not having realized before the depth of her affection for me. I expressed these feelings to Denny, but he seemed almost to disagree with me: he did not admire Beatrice, and had never pretended to be enthusiastic about my engagement.

These troubles vanished before the excitement of starting on our journey. Denny and I were like schoolboys off for a holiday.

We reached Rhodes without accident. Here we embarked on the smart little steam yacht which Hogvardt

had procured for me. Here, also, I saw the first of my new subjects, Hogvardt having engaged a couple of men who had told him they were from Neopalía and were anxious to work their passage back. I studied them with great interest : they were fine, tall, capable-looking fellows. They told me they were brothers, and their names Spiro and Demetri ; their family had served the Stephanopouloi for generations. Hearing this, I was less inclined to resent the reserve and even surliness with which they met my advances : I understood they regarded me as an intruder. I plied them, however, with questions concerning the Stephanopouloi and I learned that the only member of the family on the island, besides the old lord, was a girl whom they called ' the lady Euphrosyne ', the daughter of the lord's brother who was dead. Next I asked after my friend of the London restaurant, Constantine. He was this lady's cousin, but Demetri hastened to inform me that he came very seldom to the island, and had not been there for two years.

' Do you know where he is now ? ' I asked.

' No, my lord,' they answered together, and with great emphasis.

Something struck me as peculiar in their manner : it seemed to me they were embarrassed at my questions. Moreover I caught Spiro scowling at me when he did not know I had my eye on him.

These little mysteries, however, did not spoil my delight as we sprang over the blue waters ; and my joy was complete when, on the morning of the day I had appointed, the seventh of May, I saw Neopalía like a cloud on the sea.

As we drew nearer we could distinguish the features of the island. The coast was rocky except where a small harbour opened to the sea, and the rocks ran up from the coast, rising higher and higher till they ended in a mountain in the centre of the island. About half-way up, backed by thick woods, stood an old grey battlemented house, clearly the home of the old lord.

At five o'clock in the evening we entered the harbour of Neopalía, and brought our boat alongside the jetty. Our arrival aroused great excitement. Men, women, and children came running down the narrow steep street to the harbour. We landed; nobody came forward to greet us. I saw no one who could be the old lord, but I noticed a stout man who had an air of importance. Walking up to him I asked him politely if he would direct me to the inn; for I had discovered from Demetri that there was an inn. The stout man looked at Denny and me.

'You have come to visit Neopalía?' he asked.

A number of people had gathered round us now, and all fixed their eyes on my face.

'Oh,' said I carelessly, 'I have bought the island, you know. I have come to take possession of it.'

Nobody spoke. There was perfect silence for half a minute.

'I hope we shall get on well together,' I said with my pleasantest smile.

Still no answer came. The people round still stared. But presently the stout man said curtly:

'I keep the inn. Come. I will take you to it.'

He turned and led the way up the street. We followed, the people making a lane for us and still staring at us with stony faces.

'The people don't seem very pleased to see me,' I remarked to the innkeeper.

He shook his head, but made no answer. Then he stopped before a large house. We followed him in, and he led us upstairs to a big room. It overlooked the street, but the windows were heavily barred. The door also was massive and had large bolts inside and outside.

'You take good care of your house, my friend,' said Denny with a laugh.

'We like to keep what we have, in Neopalía,' said he.

I asked him if he would provide us with a meal ; he agreed gruffly, and left us. The food was some time in coming, and we stood at the window, peering through our prison bars. We had been in high spirits when we landed on the island, but the unfriendly reception had depressed us.

‘ It’s a better welcome than we should have got two hundred years ago,’ I said with a laugh, thinking of the Frenchman and trying to make the best of the matter.

Dinner cheered us again. When we had finished, it was beginning to grow dark, and we discussed whether I should go to visit the lord of the island.

Hogvardt was smoking his pipe at the window, while Watkins was busy with our luggage. We had brought light bags, our guns, and other small articles. The rest was in the yacht.

A sudden call came from Hogvardt, and I joined him at the window.

The scene outside was remarkable. In the narrow street, gloomy now in the failing light, there must have been fifty or sixty men standing in a circle, surrounded by women and children ; and in the centre stood our landlord, his stout figure swaying as he poured out a vehement speech. I could not hear a word he said, but presently all the people raised their hands towards heaven. I saw that some of the men held guns, some clubs, some knives ; and they all cried with furious energy, ‘ Nai, Nai. Yes, yes ! ’ Then all the men, in a body, started off up the road, the innkeeper at their head. By his side walked another man, who wore an ordinary suit, but carried himself with an air of much dignity ; I could not see his face.

‘ Well, what’s the meaning of that ? ’ I exclaimed, looking down on the street, empty again except for groups of women. I wanted to find out, and suggested that we should take a walk into the town. The proposal was accepted at once. We put on our hats, and prepared to go.

I turned the handle of the door ; it did not open. I pulled hard. Then I looked at my companions.

Hogvardt had a little lantern, and with it he carefully inspected the door.

'Locked,' he announced, 'and bolted at the top and bottom. A solid door too!' and he struck it with his fist. Then he crossed to the window and looked at the bars ; and finally he said to me, 'I don't think we can have our walk, my lord.'

I burst out laughing. The thing was too absurd. While we had been talking, the landlord must have bolted us in.

'We're nicely caught, my boy,' said Denny. 'But what's the game?'

I had asked myself the question already ; I was wondering whether Neopalía was preparing to resist a change of owners, as it had resisted before. Watkins suggested an answer.

'I imagine, my lord,' said he, 'that the people have gone to speak to the gentleman who sold the island to your lordship.'

Hogvardt's face had an anxious look. He knew something about the people of these islands.

'Is there likely to be trouble?' I asked him.

'I'm afraid so,' he answered.

There in the room we sat for nearly two hours. It was nine o'clock before anything more happened. Then came shouts from the road above us, the flash of torches, the tread of men's feet in a quick triumphant march. Next the stalwart figures of the picturesque fellows, with their white kilts gleaming through the darkness, came again into sight. The man in the suit was no longer visible. Our innkeeper was alone in front. And all, as they marched, sang loudly a strange, wild song. The women and children, crowding out to meet the men, caught up the tune in shrill voices, till the whole air seemed full of it. So stirring was the tune, that I felt the blood quicken in my veins. Here, put into English, are the words they sang :

Ours is the land !
Death to the hand
That surrenders the land !
Dead is that hand,
Ours is the land !

Forever we hold it,
Dead's he that sold it !
Ours is the land,
Dead is the hand !

Again and again they shouted the defiant words, until at last they stopped opposite the inn with a final yell of savage triumph.

'Well, this is amazing,' said Denny. 'What is the meaning of it?'

I thought I knew the meaning. I did not doubt that the same song had been sung two hundred years before, when Stefanopoulos had tried to sell the island and had been killed by the people. It seemed absurd that at the present time such a thing might happen again. But there was no law nearer than Rhodes, where there were Turkish officials. The sole law here was the law of the Stefanopouloi, and if the islanders revolted against that, why, strange things might happen even to-day in Neopalia. And we were caught in the inn like rats in a trap.

At Hogvardt's suggestion we loaded our revolvers, and filled our pockets with cartridges. We were all determined not to be bullied by these islanders.

A quarter of an hour passed ; then there came a knock at the door, while the bolts shot back. The door opened, and the face of a lad appeared.

'Vlacho, the innkeeper, bids you descend,' said he. Following him we came to the door of the inn. It was ringed round with men, and directly opposite to us stood Vlacho. When he saw me he commanded silence with a raised hand, and then addressed me.

'The Lady Euphrosyne,' he said, 'graciously bids you depart in peace. Go, then, to your boat and depart, thanking God for His mercy.'

'Not so fast, my man,' said I; 'where is the lord of the island?'

'Did you not know that he died a week ago?' asked Vlacho, with apparent surprise.

'Died!' we all exclaimed.

'Yes, sir. The Lady Euphrosyne, Lady of Neopalia, bids you go.'

'What did he die of?'

'Of a fever,' said Vlacho.

'I am sorry for it,' said I. 'But as he sold the island to me before he died, I don't see what the lady, with all respect to her, has got to do with it.'

Vlacho pointed towards the harbour. 'There lies your boat,' he said. 'Till six in the morning you are free to go. If you are found in Neopalia one minute after, you will never go. Think and be wise.' And thereupon he and all the rest turned and marched off up the hill again, breaking out once more into the old song.

Upstairs again we went, and I sat down by the window and gazed out on the night. Not a soul was to be seen. I sat thinking. Presently Denny put his hand on my shoulder.

'Are you going to give in, Charley?' he asked.

'My dear Denny,' said I, 'I wish you were out of this and safe at home.'

He smiled and repeated, 'Are you going to give in, old chap?'

'No, by Jove, I'm not!' I cried. 'I'm going to have my island.'

'Take the yacht, my lord,' advised Hogvardt, 'go to Rhodes, and get assistance.'

Well, this was sensible. We four could not conquer the island.

'Very well,' said I 'we will do that. But it's only just twelve. We might have a look round before we go. I want to see the place.'

We took our revolvers, left the inn, and proceeded up the road. We met nobody. For nearly a mile we mounted, the way becoming steeper with every step. Then there was a sharp turn off the main road.

‘That will lead to the house,’ said Hogvardt.

‘Then we’ll have a look at the house. Give us some light, Hogvardt. It’s very dark.’

Hogvardt opened his lantern and cast its light on the way. But suddenly he extinguished it, and drew us close into the rocks beside the road. We saw coming towards us, in the darkness, two figures on horseback. Their faces could not be seen; but as they passed, one said in a clear, sweet, girlish voice:

‘Surely they will go?’

‘Ay, they’ll go or pay the penalty,’ said the other voice. At the sound of it I started. For it was the voice of my neighbour in the London restaurant, Constantine Stefanopoulos. ‘The people will kill them if they don’t go.’ Then the couple disappeared in the darkness.

‘On to the house!’ I cried. I was angry at the utter scorn with which they treated me.

Soon we reached the front of the house which we had seen from the sea. We walked boldly up to it. The door stood open. We went in and found ourselves in a large hall. The windows were narrow slits, the walls massive and deep. The door was heavy and bound with iron. I called loudly, ‘Is anyone here?’ As nobody answered, I sat down in an armchair: I was in my own house, and I enjoyed the feeling. For a long while none of us spoke. Then I exclaimed suddenly:

‘I’ll stay here to-night, anyhow. I’m not going to be driven out of my own island by anybody.’

At that moment to our amazement we heard, from somewhere in the darkness of the hall beyond the faint light of Hogvardt’s lantern, a low groan, as of someone in pain. I seized the lantern, and rushed in the direction of the sound. There, in the corner of the hall, on a couch covered with a rug, lay an old man, groaning now and then

and turning restlessly. By his side sat an old serving-woman in weary heavy slumber. In a moment I guessed the truth—that this was the lord of the island.

‘He’s not dead of that fever yet,’ said I.

CHAPTER III

THE FEVER OF NEOPALIA

I SHOOK the sleeping woman by the arm. She awoke with a start.

‘Who are you?’ she cried, leaping up in fright.

‘I am Lord Wheatley; these are my friends,’ I answered. ‘I have bought the island. Who is this?’

‘But he will kill you if he finds you here.’

‘He? Who?’

‘Ah, pardon, my lord! They will kill you, they—the people—the men of the island.’

‘You mean that Constantine Stefanopoulos will kill me. But who is this?’

‘It is the lord of the island, my lord,’ she answered. ‘Alas, he is wounded, I fear, to death.’

‘Wounded? By whom?’

Her face suddenly became vacant and expressionless.

‘I do not know, my lord. It happened in the crowd. My dear lord had yielded what they asked. Yet someone stabbed him. And he cannot live.’

‘Tell me the whole thing,’ I commanded.

‘They came up here, my lord, Vlacho and all of them, and with them my lord Constantine. The Lady Euphrosyne was away. They said that a man had landed who claimed our island as his. And when my dear lord said he had sold the island to save the honour of his son, they were furious; they came near with knives, demanding that



‘ ENOUGH, FRIENDS, I YIELD ’

my dear lord should send away the stranger. At first my lord would not yield, and they swore they would kill the stranger and my lord also. Then they pressed closer; Vlacho was hard on him with drawn knife, but Constantine drew his own knife, saying to Vlacho that he must fight him before he killed the old lord. But at that Vlacho smiled. And then—'

Her voice broke, and sobs stifled her words. But soon she went on.

'And then those behind cried out that there was enough talk. And they rushed forward, pressing the nearest against him, And he, an old man, frail and feeble, cried in his weak tones, "Enough, friends, I yield, I—" and they fell back. But my lord stood for an instant, then he set his hand to his side, and tottered and fell; the blood was running from his side. The Lord Constantine fell on his knees beside him, crying "Who stabbed him?" Then Vlacho said, fixing his eyes straight on the Lord Constantine, "It was not I, my lord." "Nor I, by heaven," cried the Lord Constantine, and he rose to his feet, demanding, "Who struck the blow?" But none answered. Then Vlacho faced them all, saying, "Did he not sell us like oxen and pigs?" and he broke into the death song, and they all took up the song, none caring any more who had struck the blow. The Lord Constantine talked with Vlacho awhile, and then they went away, and he ordered me to take care of my lord. Presently he came back with the Lady Euphrosyne; when she saw my poor lord, she wept, for she loved him. She sat by him till Constantine came and told her that you would not go, and that you and your friends would be killed if you did not go. Then she went, praying heaven she might find my lord alive when she returned. "I must go," she said to me, "for though it is a shameful thing that the island should have been sold, yet these men must be persuaded to go away and not meet death." Thus she went and left me with my lord, and I fear he will die.' She ended in a burst of sobbing.

For a moment there was silence. Then I said again :
' Who struck the blow, woman ? '

She shrank from me. ' I do not know,' she moaned.

But the question she dared not answer was to find an answer.

The stricken man opened his eyes, his lips moved, and he groaned. ' Constantine ! You, Constantine ! '

The old woman's eyes met mine, and fell to the ground again.

' Why, why, Constantine ? ' moaned the wounded man. ' I had yielded, Constantine. I would have sent them— '

His words ceased, his eyes closed. A moment later his jaw dropped. The old lord of Neopalia was dead.

Then I, carried away by anger and by hatred of the man who, for a reason I did not yet understand, had struck so foul a blow, did a thing so rash that it seems to me now a mad deed.

' We will watch this old man's body,' I said. ' But do you go and tell this Constantine Stefanopoulos that I know who struck that blow, and that I will not rest until he has paid the penalty of this murder. Tell him I have sworn this, on my honour. '

' And say I swore it too ! ' cried Denny ; and I could see that Hogvardt and Watkins also meant what I meant.

The old woman looked at me with searching eyes. ' You are a bold man, my lord,' said she. ' He will never let you go now. You would go to Rhodes, and tell what you say of him ? '

' Yes. He shall die for it as sure as I live. But do as I order you. '

' It is death, death for you all,' she said, and went to the great door. Hogvardt opened it for her, and she walked away down the road. Then we carried the old man to a room that opened off the hall. When we returned, Hogvardt said suddenly, ' It is five o'clock. '

' Then we have only an hour to live,' said I, smiling, ' if we don't make for the yacht. '

' You're not going back to the yacht, my lord ? '

‘ I’m puzzled,’ I admitted. ‘ If we go, this ruffian will escape. And if we don’t go— ’

‘ Why,’ Hogvardt ended for me, ‘ we may not escape.’

I made my decision. ‘ We’ll chance that,’ I said. ‘ When they know what a villain the fellow is, they’ll turn against him. Besides, we said we’d wait here.’

At this moment Watkins appeared with a big loaf of bread, a pitcher of milk, and a large lump of cheese ; when he had set them down he remarked : ‘ In the compound behind the house two goats are tethered ; and, in a pen near the front door, are two sheep.’

‘ We can stand a siege, you mean ? ’ I asked. ‘ Well, I hope it won’t come to that.’

Hogvardt moved round the hall, examining the weapons on the walls. He grunted disapprovingly ; the guns were useless, rusted, out of date ; and there was no ammunition for them. But presently he gave an exclamation of satisfaction and came to me holding an excellent modern rifle and a large cartridge-case.

‘ See ! ’ he grunted in huge delight. ‘ C.S. on the stock. I expect you can guess whose it is, my lord.’

‘ This is very thoughtful of Constantine,’ observed Denny.

‘ As for the sheep,’ said I, ‘ perhaps they will carry them off.’

‘ I think not,’ said Hogvardt, taking an aim with the rifle through the window.

Presently Watkins carried me off to view the goats, and having passed through the lofty flagged kitchen, I found myself in a sort of compound formed by the rocks. The ground had been levelled for a few yards, and the rocks rose straight to the height of ten or twelve feet ; from the top they ran again in wooded slopes towards the peak of the mountain. Following their course with my eyes, I perceived, three hundred or more feet above us, a little wooden bungalow. While I looked, a figure came out of the door and stood gazing down towards the house.

‘ It’s a woman,’ I pronounced.

'Yes, my lord. A peasant's wife, I suppose.'

But the woman's dress did not look like that of a peasant woman; and she went into the house, appeared again, and levelled at us a large pair of binocular glasses. Now such things were not likely to be in the possession of the peasants of Neopalìa. Then she suddenly retreated, and in the distance we heard the door of the cottage closed with violence.

Just then I was summoned by a call from Denny. Hurrying back to the hall, I found him at the window, with Constantine's rifle rested on the sill. He pointed to a figure which was approaching the house. It was a man riding a pony; when he came within about two hundred yards of the house, he stopped and waved a white handkerchief.

'The laws of war must be observed,' said I. 'This is a flag of truce.' I opened the door, stepped out, and waved my handkerchief in return. The man, reassured, put his pony to a trot. I now perceived him to be the innkeeper Vlacho, and a moment later he reined up beside me.

'I have searched the island for you,' he cried. 'I am weary and hot! How came you here?'

I explained how I had taken possession of my house, and added significantly: 'But has no message come to you from me?'

He smiled with equal meaning, as he answered: 'No, an old woman came to speak to a gentleman who is in the village—'

'Yes, to Constantine Stefanopoulos,' said I.

'Well then, if you will, to the Lord Constantine,' he admitted with a careless shrug, 'but her message was for his ear only.'

'You know what she said, though?'

'My Lord Constantine told me.'

'And the young lady knows it, I hope—the Lady Euphrosyne?'

Vlacho smiled broadly.

‘ Nobody has heard the message but the Lord Constantine and me. And nobody will. If that old woman spoke, she—well, she knows and will not speak.’

‘ And you back up this murderer ? ’ I cried.

‘ Murderer ? ’ he repeated questioningly. ‘ Indeed, sir, it was an accident done in hot blood. It was the old man’s fault, because he tried to sell the island.’

‘ He did sell the island,’ I corrected ; ‘ and a good many other people will hear of what happened to him.’

He looked at me again, smiling .

‘ If you shouted it in the hearing of every man in Neopalía, what would they do ? ’ he asked scornfully.

‘ Well, I should hope,’ I returned, ‘ that they’d hang Constantine to a tall tree.’

‘ They would do this,’ he said : and he began to sing softly the song I had heard the night before.

I was disgusted at his savagery, but I said coolly : ‘ And the Lady ? ’

‘ The Lady believes what she is told, and will do as her cousin bids her. Is she not his affianced wife ? ’

‘ Is she, indeed ? ’ I cried in amazement.

‘ Certainly,’ he said. ‘ And they will rule the island together.’

‘ Will they, though ? ’ said I. I was becoming annoyed. ‘ There are one or two obstacles in the way of that. First, it’s my island.’

He shrugged his shoulders again. ‘ That,’ he seemed to say, ‘ is not worth answering.’ But I had a second shot ready for him. I knew it might be worth nothing, but I tried it.

‘ And secondly,’ I went on, ‘ how many wives does Constantine propose to have ? ’

A hit ! An obvious hit ! I could have sung in delight. The fellow was dumbfounded. He turned red, and scowled fiercely.

‘ What do you mean ? ’ he blurted out, with an attempt at defiance.

‘Never mind what I mean. Something, perhaps, that the Lady Euphrosyne might care to know. And now, my man, what do you want of me?’

He recovered his composure, but the cloud of vexation still hung heavy on his brow.

‘On behalf of the Lady of the island—’ he began.

‘Or shall we say her cousin?’ I interrupted.

‘Which you will,’ he answered. ‘On behalf, then, of my Lord Constantine, I am to offer you safe passage to your boat, and a return of the money you have paid—’

‘On condition that I give up the island?’ I asked.

‘Yes,’ said Vlacho, ‘and that you undertake, for yourself and your companions, on your word of honour, to speak to nobody of what has passed on the island or of the affairs of the Lord Constantine.’

‘And if I won’t give this promise?’

‘The yacht is in our hands; there will be no ship here for two months.’ The fellow paused, smiling at me. I ended his sentence for him.

‘And there is,’ I said, returning his smile, ‘as we know by now, a particularly sudden and fatal form of fever in the island.’

‘Certainly you may chance to find that out,’ said he.

‘But is there no antidote?’ I asked, and I showed him the butt of my revolver in the pocket of my coat.

‘It may keep it off for a day or two—no longer.’

He suddenly became impatient. ‘Your answer, sir?’ he demanded peremptorily.

‘Here it is,’ said I. ‘I’ll keep the island and I’ll see Constantine hanged.’

‘So be it,’ he cried. ‘You are warned.’ Without another word he turned his pony and trotted rapidly off down the road. I went back to the house feeling not in the best of spirits. But when my friends heard all that had passed, they applauded me, and we made up our minds to see it through.

The day passed uneventfully. At noon we carried the old lord out of his house, having wrapped him in a sheet,

and dug for him as good a grave as we could. There he must lie for the present.

When the evening came, we made our dinner off one of the goats which we had killed for the purpose, and afterwards adjourned to the broad marble pavement in front of the house. Presently Denny raised his hand, saying 'Hark!'

From the village came the sound of a horn, blowing long and shrill. And then we heard, low in the distance, yet rising in savage defiance, the death song that had been made two hundred years ago on the death of Stefan Stefanopoulos. For a few minutes we sat listening; I do not think that any of us felt very comfortable. Then I rose to my feet, saying: 'Unless I'm very much mistaken, we're going to have a lively evening.'

We went in and bolted the door, and sat down to wait. We heard the death song through the walls now; it was coming nearer.

CHAPTER IV

A RAID AND A RAIDER

It was nearly nine o'clock when the first of the enemy appeared on the road in the persons of two smart fellows in gleaming kilts and braided jackets. One was tall and broad, the other shorter and of very slight build. They came on towards us confidently. Denny and I stood at one window, Hogvardt and Watkins at the other, and quietly watched the approaching figures. No more appeared; the main body did not show itself, and the sound of the fierce song had suddenly died away. But the next moment a third man came in sight, running rapidly after the first two. They all came on together.

'Push the barrel of that rifle a little farther out,' said I to Denny. 'Let them know it's there.'

Denny obeyed; the result was a sudden pause in our friends' advance; but they were near enough now for me to distinguish the last comer. It was Constantine Stefanopoulos himself. Constantine put a whistle to his lips and blew loudly. Thereupon five more fellows appeared; in three of them I recognized old acquaintances—Vlacho, Demetri and Spiro. These three all carried guns. The whole eight came forward again, till they were within a hundred yards of us. There they halted, and, with a sudden swift movement, three barrels were levelled straight at the window where Denny and I were stationed. We ducked, yet no shot followed, and, after an instant, I peered out cautiously. The three stood motionless, their aim full on us. The other five were advancing warily. In a moment the aim of these manoeuvres flashed across me. While the three held us in check, the five were going to carry off our sheep. Without our sheep we should be hard put to it for food.

'This won't do,' said I. 'They're after the sheep.' I took the rifle from Denny's hand, and standing in the shelter of the wall, so that I could not be hit by the three, levelled the rifle, not at my human enemies, but at the unoffending sheep.

'A dead sheep,' I remarked, 'is harder to move than a live one.'

The five had now come quite near the pen of rough hurdles in which the sheep were. While Constantine and the boy stood looking on, the others leapt over the hurdles. Crack! went the rifle, and a sheep fell. I reloaded hastily. Crack! and the second sheep fell. I had hit both mortally; my skill was rewarded by a shout of anger from the robbers.

The besiegers were checked. They leapt out of the pen with alacrity. I suppose they realized that they were exposed to my fire, while I was protected by the wall from the attack of their friends. They withdrew, and when

they had joined the other three, the whole group turned and began to retreat hastily along the road, moving out of our sight.

‘ They’ll come back and fetch the sheep,’ said Hogvardt. ‘ Shall we bring them in, my lord, and put them where the goat is, behind the house ? ’

I approved of this suggestion. Armed with our revolvers, we reached the pen without interruption, moved the carcasses out, and bestowed them in the compound behind the house. Watkins ran off to the cellar to seek for some wine, and I went to the door with the intention of securing it. But before I shut it, I stood for a moment, looking out on the night and sniffing the sweet, pure air.

I was about to fasten the door, when I heard a sound that startled me—a faint distressed sigh, as of somebody in suffering ; it seemed to come from out of the darkness about a dozen yards ahead of me.

‘ Hullo,’ I exclaimed, ‘ who’s there ? ’

My first impulse was to go straight to the spot, but, thinking it might be a trap, I called to Denny and Hogvardt, telling the latter to bring his lantern. Thus protected, I stepped out of the door in the direction of the sigh.

An exclamation from Hogvardt told me that he had come on the object of our search ; but Hogvardt spoke in disgust rather than triumph.

‘ Oh, it’s only a young boy ! ’ said he. ‘ What’s wrong with him, I wonder.’ He stooped down and examined the prostrate form. ‘ By heaven, I believe he’s not touched—yes, there’s a bump on his forehead.’

By this time Denny and I were with him, and we looked down on the boy’s pale face. The bump was not such a very small one, but the flesh was not cut. It must have been the result of a fall on the hard rocky road.

‘ No doubt,’ said Hogvardt, ‘ he fell in running away and was stunned ; and they didn’t notice it in the dark,

or were afraid to stop. But they'll be back, my lord, and soon.'

'Carry him inside,' said I. 'It won't hurt us to have a hostage.'

Denny lifted the lad and strode off with him. I followed, wondering who it was that we had got hold of: for the boy was strikingly handsome. I was last in and barred the door. Denny had set our prisoner down in an armchair, where he sat now, conscious again, but still with a dazed look in his large dark eyes.

'Well, young man,' said I, 'stealing sheep and taking murder in the day's work is pretty good for a youngster like you. Who are you?'

He was still bewildered. 'Where am I?' he said indistinctly.

'You're in my house,' said I, 'and the rest of your gang's outside and going to stay there. So you must make the best of it.'

The boy's eyes closed. Suddenly I snatched the lantern from Hogvardt. But I paused before I brought it close to the boy's face, and said: 'You fellows go and get something to eat. I'll look after this youngster. I'll call you if anything happens outside.'

Left alone with the prisoner, I set the lantern close to his face and scrutinized his features. Then I began to hum the death song which had a trick of sticking in a man's head.

The lad stirred uneasily, and opened his eyes. I had never seen such fine eyes, not even in a woman. I hummed away; and the boy said, still in a dreamy voice, but with an imploring gesture: 'Ah, no, not that! Not that, Constantine!'

'He's a tender-hearted youth,' said I. Then I poured out some water and gave it to him. He took it with a trembling hand—a small, delicate hand, I noticed—and drank it eagerly.

'I am Lord Wheatley,' said I. 'You came to steal my sheep, and murder me, if necessary.'

'I didn't,' the boy flashed out. 'I thought you'd surrender if we got the sheep away. I told Constantine that they weren't to—.' He stopped short, looked round him, and said in a surprised voice, 'Where are all the rest of my people?'

'The rest of your people,' said I, 'have run away, and you are in my hands. I can do just as I please with you. And,' I went on sternly, 'when I think of what I saw here yesterday, of that poor old man stabbed by your blood-thirsty crew—'

'It was an accident,' he cried sharply.

'We'll see about that when we get Constantine and Vlacho before a judge,' I retorted grimly. 'Anyhow, he was foully stabbed in his own house for doing what he had a perfect right to do.'

'He had no right to sell the island,' the boy answered.

Now at this moment Denny in the highest of spirits bounded into the hall. 'How's the prisoner?' he cried.

'Oh, he's all right. There's nothing the matter with him,' I said, and I moved the lantern, so that the boy's face and figure were again in shadow.

'That's all right,' observed Denny. 'We might get a little information out of him.'

'Perhaps he won't speak,' I suggested.

'Oh, I think he will,' said Denny confidently: and I observed that he held a whip in his hand; he must have found it in the kitchen. 'We'll give the young ruffian a taste of this, if he's obstinate,' said Denny.

I shifted my lantern so that I could see the proud young face, while Denny could not. The boy's eyes met mine defiantly.

'Do you see that whip?' I asked. 'Will you tell us all we want to know?'

The boy made no answer, but I saw he was troubled.

'We'll soon find a tongue for him,' said Denny cheerfully; 'he richly deserves a thrashing. Say the word, Charley!'

The boy rose and stood facing that heartless young ruffian Denny; then he sank back into his chair and covered his face with his hands.

'Well, I wouldn't go out killing if I hadn't more pluck than that,' said Denny scornfully. 'You're not fit for the trade, my lad!'

The boy certainly understood, but he had no retort. His face was buried in his slim hands. I heard a stifled sob.

'Just leave us alone a little, Denny,' said I. 'He may tell me what he won't tell you.'

'But if he won't?' insisted Denny.

'If he won't,' said I, 'and you still wish it, you may do what you like.'

Denny went off to the kitchen, and again I was alone with the boy.

'My friend is right,' said I gravely. 'You're not fit for the trade. How came you to be in it? How came you, who ought to restrain these rascals, to be at their head? How came you, who ought to shun the society of men like Constantine Stefanopoulos and his tool Vlacho, to be working with them?'

I got no answer, only a frightened look.

'Who are you?' I asked. 'What's your name?'

'My name—my name?' stammered the prisoner.

'I won't tell my name.'

'You'll tell me nothing? You heard what I promised my friend?'

'Yes, I heard,' said the lad, his face deathly pale, but with fierce determination.

I laughed. 'I believe you are fit for the trade after all,' said I. But I had my last weapon still, my last question. I spoke in distinct slow tones. 'Do you generally wear—clothes like that?'

I had got home with that question. The pallor vanished, the haughty eyes sank. I saw long drooping lashes and a burning flush, and the boy's face once again sought his hands.

At that moment in came Denny brandishing his whip, and Hogvardt and Watkins with him.

‘ Well, has he told you anything ? ’ cried Denny.

‘ I have asked him half-a-dozen questions,’ said I, ‘ and he has not answered one.’

‘ All right,’ said Denny, with emphasis.

‘ It’s a gross case of obstinacy, of course, Denny, but I don’t see very well how we can horsewhip the lady.’

A sudden astounded cry, ‘ The lady ! ’ rang from three pairs of lips, while the lady herself dropped her head on the table and covered her face with her arms.

‘ You see,’ said I, ‘ this lad is the Lady Euphrosyne.’

For who else could it be that would give orders to Constantine Stefanopoulos, and ask where ‘ my people ’ were ? Who else, save the daughter of the noble house, would boast the air, the hands, the face, that graced our young prisoner ? And who else would understand English ? In all certainty here was the Lady Euphrosyne.

CHAPTER V

THE COTTAGE ON THE HILL

THE effect of my remark was curious. Denny flushed scarlet and flung down his whip ; the others stood for a moment motionless, then slunk back to the kitchen. Euphrosyne’s face remained invisible.

I had a triumphant conviction of the importance of my capture, and a determination that no misplaced chivalry should rob me of it. Men’s lives were at stake here. Therefore I did not tell the lady that she was free to go, but I said to her in a severe voice : ‘ You had better go, madam, to the room you usually occupy, while we consider what to do with you.’

She raised her head, and said in tones that sounded almost eager: 'My own room? May I go there?'

'Certainly,' said I. 'And when you've gone in, I shall lock the door.'

This was duly carried out. Then I returned to the hall, and spoke to Denny. 'Rather a strong card, isn't she?'

'Yes, but they'll be back pretty soon to look for her, I expect.'

'I'll take first watch,' said I. 'It's nearly twelve now. Go to bed, and I'll wake you at two, and you can wake Hogvardt at five.'

Thus I was left alone. I had been for some time deep in thought, reflecting on our position, when there was forced on my consciousness the sound of a light stealthy tread passing over the roof of the hall. It could only be the prisoner, but how could she be on the top of the hall? For her room was in the turret above the doorway. Yet the steps crept over my head, going towards the kitchen. I snatched up my revolver and stole across the hall and into the kitchen. My three companions were asleep, but I roused Denny.

'Go on guard in the hall,' said I. 'I want to have a look round.'

Then I went on until I reached the compound behind the house. Here I stood in the shadow of the wall; the steps were now over my head again. I glanced up cautiously, and above me, on the roof, I saw the flutter of a white kilt.

'There are more ways out of this house than I know,' I thought.

I heard next a noise as though of something being pushed cautiously along the flat roof. Then there protruded from between two of the battlements the end of a ladder. I crouched closer under the wall. The light flight of steps was let down; it reached the ground, the kilted figure began to descend. Here was the Lady Euphrosyne again. Her eagerness to go to her own room was explained: there was a way from it across the

house and out on to the roof of the kitchen. I stood still. She reached the ground, and, as she touched it, she gave a little laugh of triumph. Then she walked briskly across the compound. When she reached the angle formed by the rock running north and that which, turning to the east, enclosed the compound, she began to go up, her right foot on the north rock, her left on the east. Evidently there were steps ready for her feet. She gained the top; and I mounted in the same fashion, finding the steps cut in the face of the cliff. When I reached the top, she was a few yards ahead of me. Then she turned, saw me and screamed. I rushed on her and held her fast.

‘Where are you going to?’ I asked.

‘I was trying to escape,’ she said.

As she made no attempt to struggle, I loosed her hands. She gave a sudden glance up the hill: she seemed to measure the distance.

‘Why do you want to go to the top of the hill?’ I asked.

‘Have you friends there?’

‘No,’ she said, ‘but anywhere is better than with you.’

‘Yet there’s someone in the cottage up there,’ I observed. ‘It belongs to Constantine, doesn’t it?’

‘Yes, it does,’ she answered defiantly.

‘Do you think he’s there?’ I asked.

‘There! No, he’s in the town; and he’ll come from the town to kill you to-morrow.’

‘Then is nobody there?’ I pursued.

‘Nobody,’ she answered.

‘You’re wrong,’ said I. ‘I saw somebody there to-day.’

‘Oh, a peasant perhaps.’

‘There’s a woman in that cottage. Not a peasant; a woman in some dark-coloured dress, who uses field-glasses.’

I saw her draw back with a start of surprise.

‘It’s false,’ she cried. ‘There’s no one there. Constantine told me so.’

‘Do you believe all Constantine tells you?’ I asked.

‘Why shouldn’t I? He’s my cousin, and—’

'And your suitor?'

She flung her head back proudly. 'I have no shame in that,' she answered.

'You would accept his offer?'

'Yes, I promised my uncle that I would.'

'Good God!' said I, for I was very sorry for her. Then I asked, 'Did Constantine let you see the old woman whom I sent to him?'

'No, he told me what she said.'

'That I told him he was his uncle's murderer?'

'Did you tell her to say that?' she asked.

'I did. And,' I continued, 'on my honour, I saw what I have told you at the cottage. I know what it means no more than you do. But before I came here I saw Constantine in London. And there I heard a lady say she would come with him. Did any lady come with him?'

'Are you mad?' she asked; but I could hear her breathing quickly, and I knew that her scorn was assumed.

'Go to the cottage if you like,' said I. 'But I won't answer for what you'll find there.'

'You set me free?' she cried with eagerness.

'Free to go to the cottage; you must promise to come back. Or I'll go to the cottage, if you'll promise to go back to your room and wait till I return.'

She hesitated. But I had stirred suspicion in her: she dared not face what she might find in the cottage.

'I'll go back and wait for you,' she said. 'If I went to the cottage, and all was well, I'm afraid I shouldn't come back.'

'Then you mustn't go,' said I decisively; 'I can't afford to lose you.'

'But if you let me go, I could let you go,' she cried.

'Could you? Without asking Constantine? Besides, it's my island you see.'

'It's not,' she cried, with a stamp of her foot. And she walked straight by me and disappeared over the ledge of rock.

I set my face for the cottage under the summit of the hill. I found a rough track, and along this I made my way very cautiously. At one point it was joined at right angles by another track, from the side of the hill where the main road across the island lay. In twenty minutes the cottage loomed through the darkness before me. I fell on my knees and peered at it.

There was a light in one of the windows. I crawled nearer. Soon I was under the wooden verandah and beneath the window where the light glowed. Presently I heard through the window a voice I knew. 'Probably they have caught her,' said Vlacho the innkeeper. 'What of that? They will not hurt her, and she'll be kept safe.'

'You mean she can't come spying about here?'

'Exactly. And that, my lord, is an advantage.'

'A big advantage!' laughed Constantine. 'But won't the men want me to free her by letting the Englishmen go?'

'Not if they think Wheatley will go to Rhodes and fetch soldiers. They love the island more than her. It will all go well, my lord. And this other here?'

I strained my ears to listen. No answer came, yet Vlacho went on as though he had received an answer.

'These cursed fellows make that difficult too,' he said.

'It would be an epidemic.' He laughed.

'Curse them, yes. We must move cautiously,' said Constantine. 'What a nuisance women are, Vlacho!'

'Ay, too many of them,' laughed Vlacho.

'I had to swear to my cousin that no one was here.'

'You've made up your mind which you want?' asked Vlacho.

'Oh, my cousin, beyond doubt,' answered his master.

Now I thought that I understood most of this conversation, and I was very sorry that Euphrosyne was not by my side to listen to it. But I had heard about enough for my purposes, and I had turned to crawl away stealthily when I heard the sound of a door opening in the

house. Constantine's voice followed directly on the sound.

'Ah, my darling, my sweet wife,' he cried, 'not sleeping yet? Vlacho and I must work and plan for your sake, but you need not spoil your eyes with sleeplessness.'

Constantine did it uncommonly well. His manner was a pattern for husbands.

'For me? You're sure it's for me?' came in the Greek with a strange accent, that had first fallen on my ears in the London restaurant. 'Where is Euphrosyne now?'

'Why, she's a prisoner to that Englishman,' answered Constantine.

The voices fell to a lower level, and I could hear nothing further. I turned to resume my crawl to safety, but in an instant I was still again—still, and crouching close under the wall, motionless, holding my breath, my hand on the trigger of my revolver. For the door of the cottage was flung open, and Constantine and Vlacho appeared.

It was now nearly dawn, and had become so light that my huddled shape would be seen if any of the three turned an eye towards it. I lay still, hoping that I should not be noticed. And I should not have been noticed but for one thing; as Constantine took leave of the woman, Vlacho drew back; he drew back farther still; he was but a couple of feet from the wall of the house; and that couple of feet I filled. In a moment, with one step backwards, he would be upon me. I had a penknife in my pocket. I opened it, and dug it hard into a prominent portion of Vlacho's frame. Then I leapt up, gave the howling ruffian a mighty shove, and bolted for my life down the hill. But when I had gone twenty yards I dropped on my knees, for bullet after bullet whistled over my head. I fired back once, twice, thrice. A yell told me I had hit—but Vlacho, alas, not Constantine; I knew the voice. I again took to my heels with all speed. But as I crashed along, Constantine came crashing after me. I longed to stop and face him, but he might still have a shot

in his revolver ; I had none. And if Constantine killed me, he would kill the only man who knew all his secrets. So I ran. And just as I got within ten yards of the drop into the compound, I heard a wild cry, ' Charley ! Charley ! Where on earth are you, Charley ! '

' Why, here, of course,' said I, dropping over the top of the bank.

I have no doubt that it was the cry uttered by Denny which gave pause to Constantine's pursuit. He would not desire to face all four of us. At any rate the sound of his pursuing feet died away.

Denny, Hogvardt and Watkins stood in the compound, and on the top of the roof, out of reach—for no ladder ran from roof to ground now—stood Euphrosyne. She was not taking the smallest notice of the helpless three below, but stood quite still, gazing up towards the cottage.

' What's all the row ? ' Denny called out to me. ' Who's doing revolver-practice in the wood ? And what have you been doing ? '

' I have been running for my life,' said I, ' from the biggest scoundrels unchanged. Denny, make a guess who lives in that cottage.'

' Constantine ? '

' I don't mean him.'

' Who then, man ? '

' The lady who dined with Constantine at the next table to ours,' said I.

Denny jumped back in amazement. They were all three round me now ; and, raising my voice, I went on in an emphatic tone : ' Yes, she's there, and she's his wife.'

A moment's astonished silence greeted my announcement. Then there came from the roof above us a low, long, mournful moan that told of outraged pride and trust betrayed. I had not known that Euphrosyne was still above us, hidden by the battlements. We all looked up. Presently we heard slow steps retreating, with a faltering

tread, across the roof ; and we also went into the house in silence and sorrow. I swore then and there that Constantine Stefanopoulos should pay his reckoning.

CHAPTER VI

WE LEARN A SECRET

It was not till I found myself stretched on a mattress in the kitchen, with the idea of getting a few hours' sleep, that it struck me that Constantine's wife deserved a share of my concern and care. Her grievance against Constantine was at least as great as Euphrosyne's ; her peril was far greater. For Euphrosyne was his object ; Francesca (for that was the name by which Vlacho had called her) was an obstacle in his way, and the conversation I had heard left me in little doubt that her life was not safe. If it could be so managed that the outside world would find nothing strange in the disappearance of one Madame Stefanopoulos and the appearance of another, why, to a certainty, Francesca would die, unless I could warn or save her. But I did not see how to do either. And when I went to sleep, the echo of Euphrosyne's sad little cry still filled my ears, and I was thinking not how to save Francesca, but how to console Euphrosyne.

When I rose in the morning, Hogvardt reported that while an actual attack did not seem imminent, the house was carefully picketed both before and behind. We were shut off from the sea ; we were shut off from the cottage. A blockade would reduce us as surely as an attack. I had nothing to offer except the release of Euphrosyne. And that would, in all likelihood, not save us, while it would

leave Constantine free to play out his relentless game.

After breakfast I sat in the hall. I was alone, for the rest were engaged in various occupations.

Presently Euphrosyne came. She wore a white garment with flowing sleeves and a loose jacket over it, the Greek national dress. Her manner was altered: defiance was gone, and appeal glistened from her eyes. I sprang up, but she would not sit. She stood there, and asked simply: 'Is it true?'

I told her the whole story, starting from the scene at home in the restaurant, ending with the villainous conversation and the wild chase of the night before. When I related how Constantine had called Francesca his wife, Euphrosyne started. At the end, when I had described my encounter with him and Vlacho, she said gravely: 'I'm glad you weren't killed.'

She sat down, and rested her head on her hand. I was struck by a new beauty in her which the boy's disguise had concealed. Moreover, she seemed to have put off her extreme hostility.

'Do you mean that they will kill this woman?' she asked.

'I'm afraid it's not unlikely, unless, of course—' I paused.

'Unless,' she said, 'he lets her live now, because I am out of his hands?'

'Will you stay out of his hands?' I asked. 'I mean, as long as I can keep you out of them?'

She looked round with a troubled expression. 'How can I stay here?' she said.

'You will be as safe here now as you were in your uncle's care,' I answered.

'But I am not with you,' she cried: 'I am with the people! The island is theirs and mine. And if you will not give it up, I can do nothing. Though they knew Constantine to be all you say, yet they would follow him and not me if I yielded the island. Indeed they would



I STROLLED INTO THE KITCHEN

most likely follow him in any case. They would shut their eyes to much, in order that Constantine might marry me and become Lord.'

'It's out of the question that you should marry him,' I said firmly. 'I'm going to get him hanged; and, anyhow, it would be atrocious.'

She smiled at that. 'How long have you provisions for?' she asked.

'A few days, that's all,' I admitted. 'And we can't get out to procure any more.'

'Then it seems to me,' said Euphrosyne, 'that you and your friends are more likely to be hanged. There will be a boat from Rhodes in about a month. The officer will come then to take the tribute; perhaps the Governor will come. But till then nobody will visit the island, unless it be a few fishermen from Cyprus.'

'Fishermen? Where do they land? At the harbour?'

'No, they come to a little creek at the opposite end of the island, on the other side of the mountain.'

Euphrosyne's words had put a new idea in my mind. If I could reach that creek and find the fishermen and persuade them to help me or to carry my party off, that hanging might happen to the right man after all.

'You're thinking you can reach them?' she cried.

'You don't seem sure that you want me to,' I observed.

'Oh, how can I tell what I want? If I help you I am betraying the island. If I do not—'

'You'll have a death or two at your door, and you'll marry the biggest scoundrel in Europe,' said I.

'But anyhow you couldn't reach them,' she said. 'You are close prisoners here.'

That seemed true. I left Euphrosyne and strolled into the kitchen. Here I found Hogvardt surrounded by hunting-knives which he had collected from the walls of the hall, and Denny studying a small book. He looked up with a smile.

'I say, Charley,' he said, 'I wonder what this yarn's about. I can't translate half of it. It's in Greek, and it's something about Neopalía ; and there's a lot about a Stefanopoulos.'

'Is there? Let's see,' and, taking the book, I sat down to look at it. It was a slim old book. The Greek was written in an old-fashioned style ; it was verse. I turned to the title page. 'Hullo, this is interesting,' I exclaimed. 'It's about the death of old Stefanopoulos—the thing they sing that song about, you know.'

In fact I had got hold of the complete poem which a bard had composed at the time. It told the whole story, and I ran rapidly over it, translating here and there for the benefit of my companions. The arrival of the French Baron recalled our own with curious exactness. He also had been taken to the inn, but he had never escaped from there, and had been turned adrift the next morning. I took more interest in Stefan, and followed eagerly the story of how the islanders had come to his house and demanded that he should revoke the sale. Stefan was obstinate ; it cost the lives of four of his assailants before his door was forced. Thus far I read, and expected to find next an account of a struggle in the hall. But here the story took an unexpected turn.

'But when they had broken in,' I read, translating to my companions as I went, 'behold the hall was empty, and the house empty ! And they stood amazed. But the two cousins of the lord, who had been the hottest in seeking his death, put all the rest outside the door, and were themselves alone in the house ; for the secret was known to them who were of the blood of the Stefanopouloi. Unto me it is not known. Yet men say they went beneath the earth, and there in the earth found the lord. And certain it is they slew him, for after a time they came forth, bearing his head ; this they showed to the people, who answered with a great shout. But the cousins went back, barring the door again ; and again, when but a few minutes had passed, they came forth, and the elder of them,

being now by the traitor's death become lord, called the people in, and made a great feast for them. But the head of Stefan none saw again, nor did any see his body ; but body and head were gone whither none know, except the noble blood of the Stefanopouloi ; for they utterly disappeared, and the secret was securely kept.'

'What in heaven's name did those rascals do with the old gentleman, Charley ?' said Denny.

'It says they went beneath the earth.'

'The cellar,' suggested Hogvardt.

'But they couldn't leave the body in the cellar,' I objected ; 'and if they were only away a few minutes, they couldn't have dug a grave for it. And then it says that they "there in the earth found the lord" !'

I sat looking at the little yellow volume. 'Where did you find it, Denny ?' I asked.

'Oh, on a shelf in the corner of the hall.'

I got up and walked back to the hall. I looked round. Euphrosyne was not there. I inspected the hall door ; it was still locked on the inside. I mounted the stairs and called at the door of her room ; when no answer came, I pushed it open and took the liberty of glancing round ; she was not there. I called again, for I thought she might have passed along the way over the hall and reached the roof. This time I called loudly. Silence followed for a moment. Then came an answer, in a hurried tone, 'Here I am.' But then—the answer came not from the direction that I had expected, but from the hall ! And, looking over the balustrade, I saw Euphrosyne sitting in the armchair.

'Here I am,' she repeated.

'Yes, but you weren't there a minute ago.'

The coincidence was really a remarkable one ; it was as hard to account for Euphrosyne's disappearance and reappearance as for the vanished head and body of old Stefan. I had a conviction that one explanation must lie at the root of both these curious things, that the secret of

which the bard spoke was a secret still, but known to the girl before me, the daughter of the Stefanopouloi.

‘Where have you been?’ I asked.

‘Must I give an account of every movement?’ she replied.

‘I won’t ask you where you’ve been, if you don’t wish to tell me,’ said I. ‘But there is one question I should like to ask you. Where was Stefan Stefanopoulos killed, and what became of his body?’

As I put the question, I flung the book on the table beside her.

She started, crying out, ‘Where did you get that?’

I told her, and I added: ‘Now, what does “beneath the earth” mean? You’re one of the house and you must know.’

‘Yes, I know, but I must not tell you. We are all bound by the most sacred oath to tell no one.’

‘Who told you?’

‘My uncle. Only those of our house know. I dare not tell you anything. The oath binds me; and it binds my kindred to kill me if I break it.’

‘But you’ve no kindred left except Constantine,’ I objected.

‘He is enough. He would kill me, if I broke the oath.’

‘Hang the oath!’ said I emphatically. ‘The thing might help us. Did they bury Stefan somewhere under the house?’

‘No, he was not buried,’ she answered.

‘Then they brought him up and got rid of his body when the islanders had gone?’

‘You must think what you will.’

‘I’ll find it out,’ said I, ‘if I pull the house down. Is it a secret door or—’

She had coloured at the question. I put the latter part in a low eager voice, for hope had come to me.

‘Is it a way out?’ I asked.

She sat mute, but irresolute.

'Heavens,' I cried impatiently, 'it may mean life or death to all of us, and you hesitate!'

'What are the lives of all of you to me?' asked Euphrosyne scornfully.

'True, I forgot,' said I, with a bitter politeness. 'I beg your pardon. I did you all the service I could last night, and now—I and my friends may as well die as live! But, by God, I'll pull this place to ruins, but I'll find your secret.'

I was walking up and down now in excitement.

Suddenly Euphrosyne gave a little clap with her hands.

'What did you do that for?' I asked.

'We Neopadians like a man who can be angry, and I began to think you never would.'

'I am not the least angry,' said I.

'Yes, you are angry,' said Euphrosyne, 'and you say you're not. You are like my father. He would stamp his foot furiously like that, and say, "I am not angry, I am not angry, Phroso."'

Phroso! That diminutive of her name rather pleased me, and I repeated gently after her, 'Phroso, Phroso!'

'He always called me Phroso. Oh, I wish he were alive! Then Constantine—'

'Since he isn't,' said I, 'I'll look after Constantine. It would be a pity to spoil the house, wouldn't it?'

'I've sworn,' said Phroso.

'Well, if you won't tell me,' I said, 'I must try to find out for myself.' And I went to the kitchen to fetch a pick-axe I had seen there.

I returned with it to the hall, but on the threshold I paused, for, though there came from somewhere a mirthful laugh, the hall was empty! Phroso was gone!

CHAPTER VII

THE SECRET OF THE STEFANOPOULOI

THE next few moments brought first alarm, and then the strongest excitement, for Phroso's laugh ended, suddenly cut short, and there was a second of absolute stillness. Then from the front of the house, and from the back, came the sound of shots. Denny rushed out from the kitchen, rifle in hand.

'They're at us on both sides!' he cried, leaping to the window. 'Hogvardt and Watkins are ready at the back; they're firing from the wood. I'll look after this side.'

Denny was sure defence in front. I turned towards the kitchen, for some shots came from that direction. Half-way to the door I was arrested by a cry of distress. It was Phroso's voice. 'Help!' she cried, 'help!' And then, 'Help! Under the staircase! Help!'

At this summons I left my friends to sustain the attack; I began to suspect that it was no more than a diversion, and that the real centre of operations was 'Under the staircase'; thither I ran. The stairs rose from the centre of the right side of the hall, and led up to the gallery; they rose steeply, and a man could stand upright up to within four feet of the spot where the staircase sprang from the level floor. I was there now; and under me I heard no longer voices, but a kind of scuffle. The pick was in my hand, and I struck savagely at the boards; for I did not doubt that there was a trap-door. Chance came to my help; at the fifth or sixth blow, I must have happened on the spring of the door, for the boards rolled away under the base of the staircase; and there was revealed to me an opening beneath which lay a flight of stone steps. I heard nothing except the noise of retreating feet. Down six steps I went, then the steps ended. At that moment a shot whistled by me. The open trap-door

gave a glimmer of light. I was in a narrow passage, and a man was coming at me. I did not know where Phroso was, but I took the risk. I fired straight at him. The aim was true: he fell prone on his face before me. I jumped over his body, and ran along the dark passage; for I still heard retreating steps. Then there was a thud as though someone fell heavily to the ground, a cry of pain, and then the rapid running of feet that fled at full pace. I was brought up short by the body of Phroso, which lay, white and plain to see, across the narrow passage.

‘Are you hurt?’ I cried, eagerly.

‘He flung me down violently,’ she answered. ‘But I am not hurt otherwise.’

‘What happened?’

‘I came down to hide from you. But directly I reached the foot of the steps, I was seized by Vlacho who was crouching there with Spiro. They began to drag me away, but I would not go, and I called to you. They both caught hold of me, and were just carrying me off when you came. Vlacho kept hold of me while Spiro went to meet you, and—’

‘It seems,’ I interrupted, ‘that Constantine was less scrupulous about that oath than you were. Or how did Vlacho and Spiro come here?’

‘Yes, he must have told them,’ she admitted.

‘Well, come along, come back; I’m wanted,’ said I; and I caught her up in my arms and began to run back. I jumped again over Spiro—he had not moved—and regained the hall.

‘Stay there, under the stairs; you’re sheltered there,’ I said. Then I called to Denny, ‘What luck, Denny?’ Denny turned round with a radiant smile. I don’t think he had even noticed my absence.

‘Fine,’ said he. ‘I’ve got one and winged another, and the rest have retired a little way to talk it over.’

The attack was dying away now on both sides and we were now in no danger. Clearly it had been no more than a device for occupying our attention while Vlacho

and Spiro made a sudden dash upon us by the secret way with the design of carrying off Phroso. I found afterwards that the islanders had come to Constantine, proposing that he should make terms with me as a means of releasing their Lady. Now, since last night, Constantine, for reasons which he could not disclose, was prevented from treating with me ; he was therefore driven to make an attempt to get Phroso out of my hands in order to satisfy her people.

For the moment all was quiet, and, Watkins appearing with bread, cheese and wine, we sat down to eat. The other three listened with engrossed interest to my account of the secret of the Stefanopouloi. Phroso sat a little apart ; I turned to her and asked, ' Where does the passage lead to ? '

She answered readily enough ; the secret was out through Constantine's fault, not hers, and the seal was removed from her lips.

' If you follow it to the end, it comes out in a little cave on the seashore, near the creek where the fishermen come.'

' Ah,' I cried, ' it might help us to get there ! '

She shook her head, answering : ' Constantine is sure to have that end strongly guarded now, because he knows that you have the secret.'

' What did they do with the body of Stefan Stefanopoulos ? ' I asked. ' There was not time for them to have taken it to the end of the way, was there ? '

' No, they didn't take it to the end of the way,' said she. ' I will show you if you like. Bring a torch ; you must keep behind me, and right in the middle of the path.'

I accepted eagerly, telling Denny to keep guard. Taking a lantern, I prepared to follow Phroso : she signed to me to give her the lantern, and preceded me down the stairs. I begged her to let me go first, for it was just possible that some of Constantine's ruffians might still be there.

‘ I don’t think so,’ she said. ‘ He would tell as few as possible. You see, we have always kept the secret from the islanders.’

‘ What use was the secret ? ’ I asked, as we groped our way slowly along and edged by the body of Spiro which still lay in the path.

‘ In the first place, we could escape by it,’ she answered, ‘ if any tumult arose in the island. That was what Stefan tried to do, and would have done, had not his own kindred been against him and overtaken him here in the passage. In the second place, if anyone of the islanders became too powerful, then the ruling lord would show him great favour ; he would bid him come by night and learn the great secret ; and they two would come together down this passage. But the lord would return alone.’

‘ And the other ? ’

‘ The body of the other would be found some days later, tossing on the shores of the island,’ answered Phroso. ‘ For look ! ’ and she held the lantern high above her head so that its light was projected fifteen or twenty yards ahead of us.

‘ When they reached here,’ she went on, ‘ Stefanopoulos would stumble, and pretend to twist his foot, and he would ask the other to let him lean a little on his shoulder. Thus they would go on, the other a pace in front, the lord leaning on his shoulder ; and when they came there—do you see, my lord—there ? ’

‘ I see,’ said I, and I shivered.

‘ When they came there, the other would start and be alarmed, and turn his head round to the lord to ask what it meant—’

‘ Yes ? ’ said I. ‘ And at that moment—’

‘ The lord’s hand on his shoulder,’ she answered, ‘ would grow heavy as lead, and with a great sudden impulse the other would be hurled forward and the lord would be alone again with the secret, and alone the holder of power in Neopalía.’

I took the lantern from Phroso, and stepped a pace or two forward : and I came to the spot where the Stefanopoulos used to propel his enemy down. Here the rocks, which had narrowly confined the path, receded on either side. The path ran on, a flat rock track about a couple of feet wide, forming the top of an upstanding cliff ; but on either side there was an interval of seven or eight feet between the path and the walls of rock, and the path was unfenced. Even had the Stefanopoulos given no treacherous impulse, it would have needed a cool-headed man to walk that path by the dim glimmer of a torch. For, kneeling down and peering over the side, I saw before me, some seventy feet down, the dark gleam of water. And Phroso said :

‘ If the man escaped the sharp rocks, he would fall into the water ; then he would sink, or if he could swim he would swim round and round, till he grew weary, unless he chanced to find the only opening ; and if he found that and passed through, he would come to a rapid, and he would be dashed on the rocks. Only by a miracle could he escape death by one or other of these ways. So I was told when I was of age to know the secret. And it is certain that no man who fell into the water has escaped alive, although their bodies came out.’

‘ Did Stefan’s body come out ? ’ I asked.

‘ No, because they tied weights to it before they threw it down, to the feet and the head. Stefan is there at the bottom.’

Suddenly Phroso put out her hand, and laid it on my arm.

‘ I will not go back to my cousin who has wronged me, if—if I may stay with you,’ she said.

‘ If you may stay ! ’ I exclaimed with a nervous laugh.

‘ But will you protect me ? Will you swear not to leave me here alone on the island ? If you will, I will tell you another thing.’

‘ Whether you tell me or whether you don’t,’ said I, ‘ I’ll do what you ask.’

‘ There is a way out, past the rocks and the rapids, but it is very dangerous.’

‘ It’s not exactly safe where we are,’ I said, smiling ; ‘ and Constantine will be guarding the proper path. By Jove, we’ll try it ! ’

‘ But I must come with you ; for if you go that way and escape, Constantine will kill me. You’ll take me with you ? ’

‘ To be sure I will,’ said I.

Then we turned back and went towards the secret door. But I stopped at Spiro’s body, and said to Phroso : ‘ Will you send Denny to me ? ’

She went, and when Denny came, we took Spiro’s body and flung it down into the dark water.

‘ There lies our road, Denny,’ said I, pointing down the chasm with my finger. ‘ We’ll go along it to-night.’

‘ And the girl ? ’ he asked.

‘ She comes too,’ said I.

We walked back together, Denny being unusually silent and serious.

‘ Cheer up, Denny,’ I said, ‘ what are you so glum about ? ’

‘ I was wondering,’ said Denny, ‘ how Beatrice Hipgrave would get on with Euphrosyne.’

I looked at Denny. I tried to feel angry, or even, if I failed in that, to appear angry. But it was no use.

‘ Thanks, old man,’ said I. ‘ I’ll remember.’

CHAPTER VIII

A KNIFE AT A ROPE

OUR position was not encouraging. Had matters been anything short of desperate above ground, it would have been madness to plunge into that watery hole, and to take such a step on the off-chance of finding the fishermen at the other end, and of obtaining help from them. Yet

we none of us doubted that to take the plunge was the wiser course.

Hogvardt and Watkins went off at once to the point of departure, armed with a pick, a mallet, some stout pegs, and a length of rope. At about four o'clock they returned: they had driven three stout pegs into excavations in the rocky path, and built them in securely with stones and earth. The rope was tied firmly round the pegs, and the moistness of its end showed the length to be sufficient. I wished to descend first, but I was overruled; Denny was to lead, Watkins was to follow; then came Hogvardt, then Phroso, and lastly myself. We arranged all this as we ate a good meal; then each man stowed away some food and tied a flask of wine about him. At a quarter to five we were ready to start and we descended into the passage.

I persuaded Phroso to sit down some little way from the chasm and wait till we were ready for her; we four went on. Denny wasted no time. He laid hold of the rope at once.

'Don't come after me till I shout,' said he, and he was over the side. The lantern showed me his descending figure, while Hogvardt and Watkins held the rope ready to haul him up in case of need. There was one moment of suspense; then his voice came from far below.

'All right! There's a broad ledge twenty feet above the water, and I can see a glimmer of light that looks like the way out.'

'This is almost disappointingly simple,' said I. Watkins was the next to go. A shout announced his safe arrival. I laid down the lantern and took hold of the rope.

After Watkins went old Hogvardt, who descended with perfect safety. Denny called: 'Now we're ready for her, Charley. Lower away!' And I, turning, began to walk back to where I had left Phroso.

In another five minutes Phroso and I would have been safely down. But it was not to be. My eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom, and when I went back I left the

lantern standing by the rope. Suddenly, when I was still a few yards from Phroso, I heard a curious noise, a sort of shuffling sound. I stood still and listened, turning my head round to the chasm. The noise continued for a minute. I took a step in the direction of it. Then I seemed to see a curious thing. The lantern appeared to get up, raise itself a foot or so in the air, and throw itself over the chasm. At the same instant there was a rasp. Heavens, it was a knife on the rope! I rushed to the brink of the chasm; and in the middle of the isolated path I saw a dark object. It was a man: someone had watched our proceedings, unobserved, and seized this chance of separating our party. For a moment I stood aghast. Then I drew my revolver and fired once—twice—thrice. The bullets whistled along the path, but the dark figure was no longer to be seen there. But in an instant there came an answering shot from across the bridge of rock. Denny shouted wildly to me from below. I fired again; there was a groan, but two shots flashed at the very same moment. There were two men there, perhaps more. I stood again for a moment undecided; but I could do no good where I was. I turned and ran.

‘Come,’ I cried, when I had reached Phroso. ‘Come back! They’ve cut the rope and they’ll be on us directly.’

In spite of her amazement she rose at once. We heard feet running along the passage. They would be across the bridge now. We went on; a touch of Phroso’s fingers opened the trap-door for us; I turned, and gave the pursuers one more shot. Then I ran up the stairs and shut the door behind us. We were in the hall again—but Phroso and I alone.

A hurried story told her all that had happened. Her breath came quick and her cheek flushed.

‘The cowards!’ she said. ‘They dared not attack us when we were all together!’

‘They will attack us before very long now,’ said I, ‘and we can’t possibly hold the house against them. Why, they may open that trap-door any moment.’

I stepped close up to the door, reloading my revolver as I went, and I called out, 'The first man who looks out is a dead man.'

No sound came from below. Either they were too hurt to attempt the attack, or, probably, they preferred the safer way of surrounding and overwhelming us by numbers from outside. Indeed we were at our last gasp now.

'They'll be at us in an hour or two at most,' I said.

'And if they come?' Phroso asked, fixing her eyes on me.

'They won't hurt you, will they?'

'I don't know what Constantine would do; but I don't think the people will let him hurt me, unless—'

'Unless you try to protect me?' I asked. 'Unless you refuse to help them recover the island?'

'They will not let you have the island,' she said. 'I dare not face them and tell them it is yours.'

'Do you admit it's mine?' I asked eagerly.

A slow smile dawned on Phroso's face, and she held out her hand to me. I seized her hand and kissed it.

'Between friends,' she said softly, 'there is no thine nor mine.'

I kissed her hand again—and dropped it like a red-hot coal.

Charming as it was, I wished she had not said it to me. I wished that she would not speak as she spoke, or look as she looked, or be what she was.

At last I got up and went to the table. I found there a scrap of paper, and took out my pencil. I was determined to put the thing on a business-like footing.

'Whereas,' I wrote in English, 'this island of Neopalia is mine, I hereby give it to the Lady Euphrosyne, niece of Stefan Georgios Stefanopoulos, lately Lord of the said island—Wheatley.' And I made a copy underneath in Greek, and handed the paper to Phroso, remarking, 'There you are; that'll put it all straight, I hope.' I sat down again, feeling out of humour. I did not like giving up my island, even to Phroso.

Phroso was overjoyed at my present of the island. I did not know where to look while she was thanking me. But she was stayed by a sudden thought.

‘ But Constantine ? ’ she said. ‘ You know his secrets. Won’t he still try to kill you ? ’

Of course he would, if he valued his own neck.

‘ Oh, don’t bother about that ! ’ said I. ‘ I expect I can manage Constantine.’

‘ But what are you going to do ? ’

‘ What am I going to do ? Make a run for it.’

‘ But they’ll kill you ! ’

‘ Then shall I stay here ? ’

‘ Yes, stay here.’

‘ But Constantine’s fellows will be here before long.’

‘ You must give yourself up to them, and tell them to bring you to me. They couldn’t hurt you then.’

Well, I wasn’t sure of that, but I pretended to believe it. I dared not tell Phroso what I had actually resolved to do. It was a risky job, but it was a chance ; and I felt bound to try it. It concerned that unlucky woman on the hill. Was I to leave her to her blind trust of the ruffian whom she was unfortunate enough to call husband, and of his tool Vlacho ? Would not Constantine teach his wife the secret of the Stefanopouloi ? I made up my mind to play a little trick on Phroso, and feigned to accept her suggestion. Evidently she had great confidence in her influence now that she held that piece of paper.

Suddenly I heard the blast of a horn. Phroso also heard it.

‘ Hark,’ she said, ‘ they are summoning all the men to the town ! That means they are coming here.’

‘ Then you must lose no time in going,’ said I, and I took her hand and gently raised her to her feet. She stood there for a moment, looking at me. ‘ And if you get away ? ’ she asked. ‘ If you get to Rhodes, what will you do ? ’

‘ I shall lay an information against your cousin and the innkeeper. The rest are ignorant fellows and I bear them no grudge. Besides, they are your men now.’

'And when you've done that?' she asked gravely.

'I shall go home.'

'Shall you ever come to Neopalía again?'

'I don't know. Yes, if you invite me.'

Still regarding me intently, she drew a ring from her finger.

'You have risked your life for me,' she said. 'Will you take this ring from me?'

I bowed my head, and Phroso set the ring on my finger.

'Wear it till a woman you love gives you one to wear instead,' said Phroso. 'Then go to the edge of your island, and throw it into the sea; and perhaps, my dear friend, the sea will bring it back, a message from you to me. For I think you will never again come to Neopalía.'

I made no answer; we walked together to the door of the house.

'See the blue sea!' said Phroso. 'Is not your island beautiful? If God brings you safe to your own land, my lord, as I will pray Him to do, think kindly of your island, and of one who dwells there.'

I glanced at Phroso's face: her cheeks had turned pale, and her lip was quivering. Suddenly came a loud sharp note on the horn.

'It is the signal for the start,' said she. 'I must go, or they will be here in anger, and I shall not be able to stop them.'

She moved to leave me. I had answered nothing to all she had said. What was there that an honourable man could say?

'God bless you,' I said, as she moved away.

I stood watching her, forgetting the woman at the cottage, forgetting my own danger, forgetting everything save the old that bound me and the new that called me. So I stood till she vanished from my sight.

Then I turned, and fled through the house to do my errand. For I would save that woman, if I could. I ran through the kitchen and across the compound, making for the steps in the bank of rocks.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE COTTAGE

I CRAWLED cautiously but quickly up through the wood, with eyes keen to pierce the dusk. Of foes I had as yet seen none. Ah! Hush! I dropped on my knees. Away there on the right was a man, his arms rested on a long gun. Would he see me? I crouched lower. But I felt stealthily for my revolver, and a recollection so startling came to me that I nearly betrayed myself by some sudden movement. I had one shot only left! That one shot was my only resource. The man was motionless, and presently I ventured to move on my hands and knees. I passed another sentry a hundred yards or so away on the left. I breathed a little more freely as I came within fifty feet of the cottage.

Immediately about the house nobody was in sight. I crawled out from the shelter of the trees, and crouched on one knee on the level space in front of the cottage. The cottage door was open. In a couple of bounds I had entered the house and found myself in a narrow passage, with doors on either side of me. I opened the door on the left. The room was dark, for heavy curtains hung before the window: but as my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, I perceived I was in a sitting-room. Opposite me, against the wall, a woman lay on a couch, asleep.

This must be the woman I sought. Would she scream when I waked her, and bring those fellows out of the wood? In hesitation I stood still and watched her. Presently she sat up, looking round her with a dazed glance.

With a swift step I was by her.

‘Keep quiet. Not a word!’ I said.

I was, I daresay, an alarming figure with the butt of my revolver peeping out of my pocket. But she did not cry out.

'I am Wheatley. I have escaped from the house there,' I went on; 'and I have come here because there's something I must tell you. You remember our last meeting?'

She looked at me still in amazed surprise, but with a gleam of recollection.

'Yes, yes. You were—we went to watch you—yes, at the restaurant. But what are you doing here? This house is watched. Constantine may be here any moment, or Vlacho.'

'I'm as safe here as I was down the hill. Now listen. Are you this man's wife?'

'Of course I'm his wife. How else should I be here?' The indignation expressed in her answer was guarantee of its truth. She held her hand up to me, adding, 'There is his ring.'

'Then listen to me,' said I.

I then told her briefly what had happened to me, and I repeated the conversation between Constantine and Vlacho which I had overheard. I do not believe that in her heart she was surprised at what she heard. She had mistrusted the man. She was fearful, excited, but astonished she was not, if I read her right.

'This girl?' she said. 'I have not seen her. What is she like?'

'She is very beautiful,' said I simply. 'She knows what I have told you, and she is on her guard. You need fear nothing from her. It is your husband whom you have to fear.'

She sprang to her feet. 'I can't stay here. They may come at any moment!' She laid her hand on my arm. 'You won't leave me to be murdered?' she said. 'Will you take me with you?'

What could I do? Her coming gave little chance to her and robbed me of almost all prospect of escape. But of course I could not leave her.

'You must come if you can see no other way,' said I. 'But it's a thousand to one that we don't get through.'

I had hardly spoken when a voice outside said, 'Is all well?' and a heavy step echoed in the veranda.

'Vlacho!' she hissed in a whisper. 'Here, hide behind the curtains. I'll try to put him off for the moment. Quick, quick!'

I stepped behind the curtains, and she drew them close. I heard her fling herself on the couch. Then came the innkeeper's voice.

'Am I well?' said Madame Stefanopoulos fretfully, in answer to his question. 'My good Vlacho, I am very ill. Should I sit in a dark room and bathe my head if I were well?'

'My lady's sickness grieves me,' said Vlacho politely. 'I am come from my Lord Constantine with a message for you.'

'Isn't my husband coming to supper, then?' she asked.

'No, my lady, he is in the great house. I am here to escort you there. There my lord will sup with you. Oh, it's a grand house!'

'A grand house!' she echoes scornfully. 'Why, what is there to see in it?'

'Oh, many things,' said Vlacho. 'Yes, secrets, my lady! And my lord bids me say that from love to you he will show you to-night the great secret of his house.'

'I am tired,' said Francesco, 'and my head aches. Your secrets will wait. Tell my husband I can't come, Vlacho.'

'But my lord was most urgent that you should come,' said Vlacho.

'My good Vlacho, I am ill and I will not come. Is that enough?'

'I daren't return without you,' said Vlacho. 'My lord does not love to be opposed.'

'Then, my good Vlacho, he should not have married me,' she retorted.

Her defiant taunt rang out clear and loud. It seemed to alarm Vlacho.

'Hush, not so loud!' he said hastily. There was the hint of a threat in his voice.

'Not so loud!' she echoed. 'And why not? Is there harm in what I say?'

'No, no harm; but no need to let everyone hear,' Vlacho grumbled.

'Everyone? Who is here, then?'

'I have brought one or two men to escort my lady,' said he.

'But if they don't know that I am the wife of Constantine, how can I go to the house and stay with him?' she asked.

'Oh,' said he, 'there is an excellent hiding place in the house, where my lord can bestow you comfortably, and nobody will know that you are there, except the few faithful men who have guarded you here.'

'Indeed, if I am still to be a stowaway, I'll stay here,' said she. 'Go and tell my husband what I say.'

A pause followed. Then Vlacho said in obstinate tones: 'You must come. I shall call my men and carry you.'

'I will not come,' she said in a low voice, resolute and fierce.

Vlacho laughed. 'We'll see about that,' said he.

'What are you going to the window for?' she cried.

'To call Demetri and Kortes to help me,' said he.

I drew back, resting against the window-sill. My eyes fell on a lance standing against the wall. At that moment I asked nothing better than to bury its point in the fat innkeeper's flesh.

'See,' said Vlacho, 'my hand is on the curtains. Will you come, my lady?'

'I will not come,' said she.

There was one last short interval. I held my breath. My revolver rested in my pocket; the noise of a shot would be fatal. Stealthily I put out my hand and took firm hold of the lance. With God's help I would drive it home with one silent sufficient thrust. There would

be a rogue less in the world and another chance for her and me.

‘As you will, then,’ said the innkeeper.

The curtain-rings rattled along the rod; the heavy hangings gave back. The moon streamed full in Vlacho’s eyes and on the pale strained face behind him. He saw me, and his hand flew to his belt. He drew a pistol out, but I was too quick for him. I drove the great blade straight into his breast. With a groan he flung up his arms and fell sideways, tearing down the curtain which fell over his body. I drew the lance back. Madame Stefanopoulos glared at me, speechless. But my eyes fell from her to the floor; for there I saw two long black shadows. A sudden and desperate inspiration seized me. If we were both held guilty of this act, we could render no service to each other. If she were still unsuspected, she might yet help herself and me.

‘Throw me over,’ I whispered in English. ‘Cry for help.’

‘What pretend—?’

‘Yes. Quick.’

‘But they’ll—’

‘No, no. Quick, for God’s sake, quick!’

‘God help us,’ she whispered. Then she cried loudly, ‘Help! help! help!’

I sprang towards her. There was the crash of a man leaping through the open window. I turned. Behind him I saw Demetri standing in the moonlight. Other figures hurried up. The man who had leaped in, a tall, handsome fellow—held a pistol to my head. I let my hands drop to my side and faced him with a smile on my lips. It must be death to resist; surrender might open a narrow way of safety.

‘I yield,’ said I.

‘Who are you?’ he cried.

‘I am Lord Wheatley,’ I answered. ‘I was trying to escape. I came in while Madame here was asleep and hid behind the curtain.’

'Yes, yes,' said she. 'It is as he says Kortes; and then Vlacho came—'

'And,' said I, 'when the lady had agreed to go with Vlacho, he came to the window to call you; and he came on me behind the curtain.'

'Kill him, Kortes, kill him!' cried Demetri fiercely.

'Peace!' said Kortes. 'The man has yielded. Do I kill men who have yielded? The Lady of the island and my Lord Constantine must decide his fate. Are you armed, sir?'

It went to my heart to give up that last treasured shot of mine. But he was treating me as an honourable man. I handed him my revolver.

'In my charge you are safe,' said Kortes, and he stooped and lifted the curtain from Vlacho's face. The innkeeper stirred and groaned. He was not dead yet.

'Stay here and tend him,' said Kortes to Demetri. 'I will send aid to him.' Then, turning to me, he said, 'Come, let us go.'

'I shall come with you, too,' said Madame Stefanopoulos. 'I cannot stay here.'

I walked out of the house and took the place Kortes indicated to me in the middle of a line of islanders, some ten or twelve in number. Kortes placed himself by my side, and Madame Stefanopoulos walked on his other hand. We started down the hill towards the house, and presently turned down the path that led up from the town.

'Where are we going?' I asked Kortes.

'To the town,' he answered.

We pursued our way down the hillside. A few lights twinkled from the sea. I heard the bell of a church strike twelve: then another bell began to ring. Our escort stopped with one accord. They took off their caps and knelt reverently, Kortes with the rest.

When we were on our way again, I asked Kortes the reason for this.

'To-day is the feast of St. Tryphon,' he said.

We had now reached the main road and were descending rapidly towards the town. We held on our way till we came to a rather large square building. Before this Kortes halted. 'Here you must lodge with me,' said he. 'Concerning the lady I have no orders.'

Madame Stefanopoulos caught my arm.

'I must stay too,' said she. 'I can't go back to my house.'

'It is well,' said Kortes calmly. 'There are two rooms.'

The escort ranged themselves outside the building, which appeared to be either a sort of barrack or a place of confinement. We three entered. At a sign from Kortes, Madame Stefanopoulos passed into a large room on the right. I followed him into a smaller room, and flung myself in exhaustion on a wooden bench. Kortes stood regarding me, and the look in his eyes was not unfriendly. The bell, which had continued to ring till now, ceased. Then Kortes said to me in a low voice: 'Take courage, my lord. For a day you are safe. Not even Constantine would dare to kill a man on the feast of St. Tryphon.'

Before I could answer he was gone. I heard the bolt of the door run home. I was a prisoner.

CHAPTER X

THE JUSTICE OF THE ISLAND

WHEN I awoke in the morning, I found the sun streaming into the whitewashed cell-like room. It was the feast of St. Tryphon, all praise to him! Kortes said that I could not be executed that day. I was, strangely enough, in a hopeful frame of mind. I felt sure that Denny had found

his way safely, and that the fishermen had given him their help.

I had not been awake long when half-a-dozen men filed into the room, Demetri at their head.

'Bring him along,' he ordered; and they marched me out into the street.

It was clearly a day of festival. The houses were decked with flags; several windows exhibited pictures of the Saint. Presently we joined a procession headed by an old white-bearded man, who wore the gown and cap of a priest, and carried a large picture of St. Tryphon. We all moved on together, until we reached a broad level space, covered with turf and surrounded for about half its circuit by a bank two or three feet high. On this bank sat some twenty people, and crowded in front of it was a picturesque company of armed peasants. The old man with the picture made his way to the centre of the level ground. Thrice he raised the picture towards the sky, every one uncovering his head and kneeling down the while. He began to pray.

My attention was caught by a small group which occupied the centre of the raised bank. There, sitting side by side, were Phroso and her cousin Constantine. On a hurdle, at Constantine's feet, lay Vlacho, his face pale and his eyes closed. Behind Phroso stood Kortés. Constantine's wife was nowhere to be seen. Phroso sat with pale face and downcast eyes. Constantine remained motionless, with a frown on his brow but a slight smile on his lips.

When the old priest had finished his prayers, he poured forth a long speech in which he referred frequently to 'the barbarians'—a term he used to denote my friends and myself. After that he seated himself between Phroso and Constantine, who made room for him. When he had taken his place, about twenty of the men came into the middle of the ring and began to dance.

The dance ended, there was a hush of expectation, and the surrounding crowd of women and children drew closer

in. 'Step forward,' said one of my guards, I obeyed him and stood waiting the pleasure of the assembly. All eyes were fixed on Constantine. He rose slowly to his feet, bowed to Phroso, and pointed in a dramatic fashion at Vlacho's body. Just as Constantine was opening his mouth, I observed loudly :

'Yes, I killed him, and the reason no man knows better than Constantine Stefanopoulos.'

Constantine glared at me, and, ignoring my remark, launched out on a eulogy of the dead innkeeper. His audience drew closer ; they became very still ; angry and threatening glances were bent on me. Constantine lashed himself to fury as he cried, 'Vlacho died for our island, which this barbarian claims as his ! This man has killed Vlacho and put our Lady out of her inheritance. What shall he suffer ? For although we may not kill on St. Tryphon's day, we may judge on it, and the sentence may be performed at daybreak to-morrow. What shall this man suffer ? Is he not worthy of death ?'

The answer came in a deep fierce growl, of 'Death, death !'

Now Phroso rose suddenly. 'Why this turmoil ?' she asked. 'The stranger did not know our customs. He thought that the island was his by right, and when he was attacked he defended himself. Now he has given back the island to me. Behold his writing !' She held up the paper which I had given to her and read the writing aloud. 'What have you against him now ?' she asked. 'He has given back the island. Why shall he not depart in peace ?' and she sat down.

The effect was great. There were murmurs of surprise and intense excitement.

'Since he has given back the island, he need not die,' said the priest, with a sigh of relief.

But Constantine was not beaten yet. He sprang up and cried in bitterly scornful tones :

'Ay, let him go—let him go to Rhodes ! How guileless you are, O Neopalians ! Ay, let him go with his story to

the Governor at Rhodes, and do you hide in the rocks when the Governor comes with his soldiers to set this man over your island and to punish you! Do you not remember when the Governor came before? Is not the mark of his anger branded on your hearts?'

Hesitation and suspicion were aroused again by this appeal. But the old priest rose and stretched out his hand for silence.

'Let the man speak for himself,' he said. 'Let him tell us what he will do if we set him free. Speak, sir. We will listen.'

'I bear you Neopallians no malice,' I said. 'I have given back the island to the Lady Euphrosyne and what I give I do not ask again either of a Governor or of anybody else. Therefore your island is safe, and I will swear to that by what oath you will. And so far as I have power, no man or woman of you all shall come to any harm by reason of what has been done; and to that also I will swear.'

'But wait,' I continued. 'There is a man here who has murdered an old man, his kinsman, who has contrived murder against a woman, who has foully deceived a girl. I swore that I would not rest till that man paid the penalty of his crimes. By that oath I stand. Therefore, when I go from here, I shall go to the Governor at Rhodes, and I shall pray him to send to Neopallia and take that one man and hang him. And I will come with the Governor's men and see that thing done. Then I will go peaceably to my own land.'

There was a pause of surprise. I heard low eager whisperings and questions. At last the old priest asked:

'Who is this man?'

'There he is,' said I. 'There—Constantine Stefanopoulos.'

A hoarse cry rose from the crowd.

'Yes, Constantine Stefanopoulos,' I cried. 'Did he not stab the old man after he had yielded? Did he not—'

'We all had a hand in the business of the old man,' interrupted Demetri.

‘ You lie, and you know it,’ said I hotly. ‘ He had yielded, and the rest had left off attacking him ; but Constantine stabbed him. Why did he stab him ? ’

‘ Why should I stab him ? ’ cried Constantine. ‘ He was stabbed by someone who did not know that he had yielded.’ Then I saw his eyes fall suddenly on Vlacho. Dead men tell no tales and deny no accusations. ‘ It was Vlacho who, in his hasty zeal, stabbed the old man.’

He had gained a point by this clever lie, and he made haste to press it to the full against me.

‘ This man,’ he explained, ‘ will go to Rhodes and denounce me ! But did I kill the old man alone ? Did I besiege the Englishman alone ? Will the Governor be content with one victim ? Men of the island, it is your lives and my life against this man’s life ! ’

They were with him again, and many shouted : ‘ Let him die ! Let him die ! ’

With a sudden leap I was free from those who had held me ; for among the listening women, I saw that old woman whom we had found watching by the dying lord of the island. I seized her by the wrist and dragged her forward, crying to her : ‘ In Heaven’s name, tell the truth. Who stabbed the old lord ? Whose name did he utter in reproach when he lay dying ? ’

She stood trembling in the centre of the throng.

‘ Did he not say “ Constantine ! You, Constantine ? ” ’ I asked.

The old woman was silent ; she was half-dead with fear, and fastened fascinated eyes on Constantine.

‘ Speak the truth, woman,’ I cried. ‘ Speak the truth.’

My witness failed me. Her terror of Constantine was too great : the single word that came from her trembling lips was ‘ Vlacho ’. Constantine gave a cry of triumph ; the islanders drew together.

‘ Swear her on the sacred picture,’ I cried. ‘ If she swears by the picture, and then says it was Vlacho, I am content to die here and now as a false accuser.’

‘Yes, let her swear on the sacred picture,’ cried several.
‘Then we shall know.’

The priest brought the picture and swore her on it with great solemnity. She shook her head feebly and fell to choked weeping. But the men round her were resolute.

‘Now you are sworn, speak,’ said the priest solemnly.
A hush fell on us all.

‘Speak,’ said the priest to her gently.

Then she spoke in low fearful tones.

‘Vlacho was there, and his knife was ready. But my lord yielded, and cried that he would not sell the island. When they heard that they drew back, Vlacho with the rest. But my Lord Constantine struck; and when my lord lay dying, it was the name of Constantine that he uttered in reproach.’ And the old woman flung herself on the ground at Constantine’s feet, crying, ‘I could not swear falsely on the picture. Ah, my lord, mercy, mercy!’

For one instant Constantine sat still, then he sprang to his feet, crying: ‘Yes, I killed the old man! Was not the island sold? Was he not bound to this man here? So I slew him, and therefore I have sought to kill the stranger also. Who blames me? If there be any, let him stand now by the stranger, and let my friends stand by me. Who loves Neopalia?’

The islanders looked at one another, hesitating, and then at Constantine. Constantine had been ready with his stirring words, but he did not rush first to the attack. Beside me stood Kortes, who had not left his place by my side. And Kortes looked as though he could give an account of one or two. But the hesitation among Constantine’s followers did not last long. Demetri brandished a sword over his head and rushed straight at me. It seemed to be all over. But on a sudden I was pulled back by a powerful arm. Kortes flung me behind him and stood between me and Demetri’s rush. An instant later ten or more of them were round Kortes. He struck at them, but they dodged him. Suddenly Demetri’s great sword flashed between me and the sky. But it did not

fall. Phroso, pale, breathless, trembling in every limb, darted between me and the grim figure of my assailant, and with anger gleaming in her dark eyes, cried :

‘ If you kill him, you must kill me ; I will not live if he dies. His life is my life ; for I love him as I love my life—ah, and God knows, more, more, more ! ’

CHAPTER XI

THE LAST CARD

‘ His life is my life, for I love him as my life.’ The words rang in my ears ; my heart beat fast in answer.

Demetri and his angry comrades had fallen back and stood staring in awkward bewilderment, but the women had crowded in upon us with eager excited faces ; one of them ran to Phroso and caught her round the waist, stroked her hand, and murmured soft woman’s comforting.

Then came a cold rasping voice, charged with a bitter anger.

‘ What is this comedy, cousin ? ’ asked Constantine. ‘ You love this man ? You, the Lady of the island—you who have pledged your troth to me ? ’ He turned to the people.

‘ You all know,’ said he, ‘ that we are plighted to one another.’

A murmuring assent greeted his words.

Then I stepped forward, in spite of Kortes, who tried to restrain me. I walked up to within two yards of Constantine, the islanders giving way before me, and I said loudly, ‘ Was that same betrothal before you married your wife or afterwards ? ’

He sprang from his seat, as if to leap upon me, but he sank back again, his face convulsed with passion. ‘ His wife ! ’ went round the ring in amazed whisperings.

'Yes, his wife,' said I. 'The wife who was with him when I saw him in my country; the wife who came with him here, who was in the cottage on the hill, whom Vlacho would have dragged by force to her death, who lay last night yonder in the guard-house. Where is she, Constantine Stefanopoulos? Or is she dead now, and you free to wed the Lady Euphrosyne? Is she alive, or has she by now learnt the secret of the Stefanopouloi?'

I do not know which made more stir among the people, my talk of his wife or my hint about the secret. They crowded round me. Then the eyes of all turned on Constantine.

'What is this lie?' he cried. 'I know nothing of a wife. True, there was a woman in the cottage.'

'Ay, there was a woman in the cottage,' said Kortes. 'She was in the guard-house; but this morning she was gone.'

'That woman is his wife,' said I; 'but he and Vlacho had planned to kill her, in order that he might marry your Lady and have your island for himself.'

'Shall he live to speak such a slander against my lord?' cried Demetri.

'Who was the woman, then,' said I, 'and where is she?'

'The stranger who came to steal our island,' said Constantine, 'asks me where the woman is. But I ask it of him—where is she? For it stands with him to put her before you that she may tell you whether I, Constantine Stefanopoulos, am lying to you. You know me, you know my family,' he cried. 'Yet you hearken to the desperate words of a man who fights for his life with lies! How shall I satisfy you? For I have not the woman in my keeping. Shall I swear to you now?'

The current began to run strongly with him. The islanders were ready to trust him if he would pledge himself to them.

'Swear then!' they cried. 'Swear to us on the sacred picture that what the stranger says is a lie.'

‘ On the sacred picture ? ’ said he. ‘ Is it not too great and holy an oath for such a matter ? Is not my word enough for you ? ’

‘ No. Swear on the picture,’ cried the people. ‘ It is enough if you swear on the picture ! ’

I could see that Constantine was not in love with the suggestion, but he accepted it. The people greeted his consent with obvious pleasure, all except Demetri. Demetri knew the truth, and, though he could cut a throat with a light heart, he would shrink from a denial of the deed when sworn on the holy picture. But Constantine made little trouble about it, and swore before them unhesitatingly.

The eyes of the men round him turned on me again and seemed to ask what plea for mercy I could now advance. But I caught at my chance.

‘ Let Demetri swear,’ said I coolly, ‘ that, so far as his knowledge goes, the truth is no other than what the Lord Constantine has sworn.’

Demetri cleared his throat hoarsely, but did not speak : his face was pale, and there was sweat on his brow. Constantine’s eyes said, ‘ Swear, fool, swear ! ’

‘ Let Demetri also swear,’ cried the crowd. ‘ If he knows nothing, it is easy.’

They brought the picture to Demetri. He shrank from it as though its touch would kill him, and cried hoarsely : ‘ Take it away, take it away. I will not swear.’

‘ Let him swear,’ said Phroso, and the whole throng echoed her command.

Demetri looked round, seeking escape, but there was none.

‘ Will you let me go unharmed if I speak the truth ? ’ he asked sullenly.

‘ Yes,’ answered Phroso, ‘ if you speak the whole truth, you shall go unhurt.’

The excitement was intense now ; for Demetri took the oath, Constantine watching, with pale strained face. Then followed a moment’s utter silence, broken an instant later



THEY BROUGHT THE PICTURE TO DEMETRI

by an outbreak of wondering cries, for Demetri said, 'Follow me,' and turned to walk in the direction of the town. 'Follow me,' he said again. 'I will tell the truth. I have served my lord well, but a man's soul is his own. No master buys a man's soul. I will tell the truth.'

The change in feeling was shown by what happened next. At a sign from the priest, Kortés and another each took one of Constantine's arms and raised him. He was trembling now and hardly able to set one foot before the other. Justice was hard on his heels, and he was a coward at heart. Thus, bearing him with us, we followed Demetri to the narrow street that ran up from the sea. In front of me went Phroso, and with her the woman who had come to comfort her.

When Demetri came to the door of the inn, he halted and then entered. We followed, Constantine's supporters bringing him also with us. We passed through the house into an enclosed yard. Here Demetri stopped. 'Last night,' he said, 'Vlacho bade me come with him to the cottage on the hill, and, if he called me, I was to come and help him to carry the woman to the house of my Lord Constantine. He called, and I, coming with Kortés, found Vlacho dying. Kortés bade me stay with Vlacho; but when Kortés was gone and Vlacho dead, I ran and told my lord what had happened. My lord was greatly disturbed and bade me come with him; so we came to the town and passed by the guard-house. Presently, when the clock had struck two, we saw Kortés come out from the guard-house; and the woman was with him. I heard the lady speak.'

'It happened as he says,' interrupted Kortés. 'I promised secrecy, but I will speak now.'

'"I must go to the Lady Euphrosyne," said she to Kortés,' continued Demetri. '"I have something to say to her." Kortés answered, "She is lodging at the house of the priest," and directed her to the house; then he turned back into the guard-house. The lady came slowly and fearfully up the road; my lord beside me laughed

gently, and twisted a silk scarf in his hand ; and as she went by, my lord sprang out, and fastened the scarf across her mouth before she could cry out. Then he and I lifted her, and carried her swiftly down the street. We came here, to Vlacho's inn ; the door was open. We carried her through the house and brought her where we stand now, and laid her on the ground. My lord tied her hands and her feet, so that she lay still ; her mouth was already gagged. Then my lord took five pieces of gold from his purse and said, looking into my eyes, " Is it enough ? " I understood, and said, " It is enough, my lord," and he went away and left me. I drew my knife from its sheath and came and stood over the woman, looking how I might strike the blow. She lay there motionless. But the night was bright, and I saw her eyes fixed on mine. I stood long by her with my knife in my hand ; then I knelt down by her to strike. But her eyes burned into my heart, and I could not strike her. I flung down my knife. The eyes of the lady closed, and I saw that she had fainted. And I raised her in my arms and carried her across this piece of ground.'

He ended, and stood for a moment silent. None of us spoke.

'I took her,' said he, ' to Vlacho's larder, and I laid her on the floor. Then I returned to the house, and called to Panayiota, Vlacho's daughter, with whom I am of kin. I charged her to watch the lady till I returned, saying that Vlacho had bidden me bring her here ; for I meant to return in a few hours and carry the lady to some place of safety, if I could find one. Panayiota promised to keep the lady safe. Then I ran after my lord, and found him at the house, and told him that the deed was done, and that I had hidden the body here ; and I begged leave to return and make a grave for the body. But he said, " It will be soon enough in the evening," and I could not find means to leave him and return to the lady.'

Demetri ended. Phroso stepped lightly to the low hut that was the larder ; she knocked on the door but there

was no answer. She beckoned to Kortes, and he wrenched open the door. We crowded round, I among the first. There, indeed, was a strange sight. For on the floor, propped against the side of the hut, sat a buxom girl, asleep: Panayiota had watched faithfully all night, and now slept at her post. On her lap rested the head of the lady; the bonds with which she had been bound lay on the floor by her; and she also slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.

‘Hush,’ said Phroso, very softly. She stepped forward and fell on her knees by the sleeping woman, and she lightly kissed Constantine’s wife on the brow. ‘Praise be to God!’ said Phroso softly, and kissed her again.

CHAPTER XII

LAW AND ORDER

THE sight of Francesca in Panayiota’s arms confirmed Demetri’s story. From women rose compassionate murmurs, from men angry growlings which expressed their emotion at the helpless woman’s narrow escape. Her salvation must bring mine with it; for it was the ruin of her husband and my enemy.

Kortes and another dragged Constantine Stefanopoulos forward till he stood within two or three yards of his wife. None interposed on his behalf. Constantine seemed to recognize his plight; his eyes dropped to the ground in despair. There was not a man now to raise a voice or a hand for him.

Kortes, appearing to take the lead now by general consent—for Phroso made no sign—, looked round on his fellow-countrymen.

'We may not put any man to death on St. Tryphon's day,' said he.

The sentence was easy to read. The islanders understood it, and approved in a deep stern murmur. The criminal tottered under the strong hands that held him. 'Not on this day, but to-morrow at break of day,' said Kortes, and none pleaded for mercy or delay.

Constantine, seeing the last hope gone, swayed and fell into the arms of the man who, with Kortes, held him, uttering a long low moan of fear. He was carried out into the street on his way to the prison, and we, one and all, in dead silence, followed. The narrow street was choked with the crowd which attended Kortes and his prisoner to the doors of the guard-house.

Then Phroso's eyes sought mine in a rapid glance, in which I read joy for my safety; but the glance fell as I answered it, and she turned away in confusion. Her avowal, forgotten for an instant, recurred to her mind and dyed her cheeks red. Averting my eyes, I looked down the street towards the sea. The thought of her and of nothing else was in my mind.

A sudden exclamation burst from my lips and I pointed to the harbour. Every head followed the direction of my outstretched finger; every pair of eyes was focused on the object that held mine. A short, breathless silence—then, low in fear or loud in excitement, broke forth the cry:

'The Governor! The Governor!'

For a gunboat, flying the Turkish flag, was steaming slowly into the harbour of Neopalia.

The sight wrought a transformation. In a moment the throng round me melted away. The street grew desolate. I stood unheeded, apparently forgotten; festival, tumult, trial, condemnation seemed passed like visions; the flag that flew from the gunboat brought back modern days, and ended the wild drama we had played. How had the Governor come before his time, and why?

‘Denny!’ I cried aloud in inspiration and hope, and I ran at full speed down the steep street to the jetty. As I arrived there the gunboat also reached it, and, a moment later, Denny was shaking my hand till it felt like falling off, while from the deck of the boat Hogvardt and Watkins were waving wildly.

I passed with Denny on to the deck, and presented myself, with a low bow, to a gentleman who stood there. He was a tall robust man, somewhat under fifty years old; his face was heavy and broad, in complexion dark and sallow; he wore a short black beard; his lips were full, his eyes acute and small. I did not like the look of him much; but he meant law and order and an end to the wild ways of Neopalía. For this, as Denny whispered to me, was no less a man than the Governor himself, Mouraki Pasha.

He spoke to me in low, slow, suave tones, employing the Greek language.

‘You must have much to tell me, Lord Wheatley,’ he said with a smile. ‘But first I must assure you with what pleasure I find you alive and unhurt. Be confident that you shall not want redress for the wrongs which these turbulent rascals have inflicted on you. I know these men of Neopalía: they are hard men; but they know me, and that I can be a hard man also. But you will wish to speak with your friends first,’ he went on courteously. ‘May I ask your attention in half an hour’s time?’

The great man turned away, and Denny caught me by the arm, ‘Now, old man, tell us all about it.’

I told them all faithfully, except one incident—Phroso’s declaration of love for me. Denny and the other two listened with frequent exclamations of surprise, and danced with exultation at the final worsting of Constantine.

‘Now it’s your turn,’ said I.

‘Oh, our story’s nothing. We just got through that old drain, and came out by the sea, and all the fishermen

had gone off, except one old chap. Well, we didn't know how to get back to you, and the old chap told us the whole place was alive with armed ruffians, so—'

'Tell the story properly, will you?' said I sternly.

At last, by much questioning, I got the story from him. It was by no means so ordinary a matter as Denny's modesty would have had me think, and my adventures seemed trivial indeed beside the tale of perils and hardships my companions had to undergo before reaching the sea through the tunnel. They succeeded finally in persuading a fisherman to help them row out to sea. But exhausted by their efforts under the increasing heat of the sun, they collapsed in the bottom of the boat, unable to summon up enough strength to wield the oars. The boat tossed idly on the water. Thus they lay while I fought my duel with Constantine on the other side of Neopalía.

Then, while they were still four miles from the fishing-fleet, where lay their only known chance of help for me or for themselves, there came suddenly to their incredulous eyes a shape on the sea and a column of smoke. The gunboat came into view, growing clear and definite. She moved quickly towards them; the interval grew less and less. They shouted. A boat put out to them: they were taken on board. Mouraki heard their story, and decided to visit the island at once. Thus came Mouraki to Neopalía; thus came, as I hoped, an end to our troubles.

More than the half-hour which the Governor had given me passed swiftly in the narrative; then came Mouraki's summons and my story to him, received at its end with assurance of redress for me and punishment for the islanders.

Great was the change in the islanders when, in the cool of the evening, I walked up the street by Mouraki's side, escorted by soldiers and protected by the great gun of the gunboat commanding the town. There were many women to watch us, few men, and these unarmed and with meek bearing. Mouraki seemed to detect my surprise.

'They made a disturbance here three years ago,' said he, 'and I came. They have not forgotten.'

We were passing the guard-house now. An officer and five men fell out from our escort and took their stand by its doors. As we passed on, leaving Constantine in this safe keeping, Mouraki said to me, 'I must ask you for hospitality. As Lord of the island, you enjoy the right of entertaining me.'

I bowed. We turned into the road that led to the old grey house; as we neared it, I saw Phroso coming out of the door. She walked rapidly towards us and paused a few paces from the Governor, curtsying to him and bidding him welcome. Mouraki was silent, and motioned with his hand to Phroso to take her place by him, and thus we three walked up to the house. It was alive now with women and men, and there was a bustle of preparation for the great man.

Mouraki sat down in the armchair which I had been accustomed to use, and, addressing one of his officers, issued quick orders for his own comfort and entertainment; then he turned to me and said civilly enough:

'Since you seem reluctant to act as host, you shall be my guest while I am here.'

I murmured thanks. He waved his hand to Phroso in dismissal. She drew back, curtsying, and mounted the stairs to her room. Mouraki bade me sit down, and his orderly brought cigarettes. Left alone together, we began to smoke. I was in a rage at Mouraki's treatment of Phroso. But the man interested me. I thought that he was now considering great matters: the life of Constantine, perhaps, or the penalties that he should lay on the people of Neopalía. With such thoughts I studied him as he sat smoking silently.

Mouraki finished his cigarette, and took another; then, obviously summarizing the result of his meditations, he remarked: 'Yes, I don't know that I ever saw a handsomer girl than the Lady Euphrosyne.'

'No more did I, your Excellency,' said I.

But I did not like the expression of Mouraki's eye; my contentment, due to the safety of my friends, my own escape, and the end of Constantine's ill-used power, was suddenly clouded as I looked at the baffling face and subtle smile of the Governor. What was it to him whether Phroso were a handsome girl or not?

And I suppose I might just as well have added—What was it to me?

CHAPTER XIII

THE SMILES OF MOURAKI PASHA

At dinner Mouraki proved a charming companion: his official reserve and pride vanished. He gave me a delightful evening, and bade me a most cordial good-night. I did not know whether his purpose had been to captivate or merely to analyse me.

I rose very early the next morning, and, hastening off to the harbour, boarded the yacht, and enjoyed a glorious bathe with Denny.

On my way back I saw Kortés before me, walking along slowly. Overtaking him, I began to talk. He listened for a little, and then raised his calm honest eyes to mine.

'And the Lady Phroso?' he said gently. 'What of her? You have not spoken to her yet?' Then he added, 'She shuns you perhaps?'

'I don't know,' said I, feeling embarrassed under his direct gaze.

'It is natural, but it will last only till she has seen you once. I pray you not to linger, my lord. For she suffers shame at having told her love, even though it was to save you. It is hard for a maiden to speak unasked. Lose no time in telling her your love, my lord,' he urged. 'It

may be that she guesses, but her shame will trouble her till she hears it from your lips. Seek her, without delay.'

I felt my eyes drop before Kortes's look; but I shrugged my shoulders, saying carelessly :

'It was only a friendly device the Lady Phroso used to save me. She doesn't really love me. It was a trick. But I'll thank her for it heartily; it was of great help to me, and a hard thing for her to do.'

'It was no trick. You know it was none. To me, you, my lord, should be the happiest, proudest man alive.'

'It's absurd,' said I. 'She has known me only a few days, and there were other things to think of then than love-making.'

'You fought against her and for her,' he said; 'you proved yourself a man before her eyes. Fear not, my lord; she loves you. She said it herself,' he continued. 'As her life, and more.'

'Hold your tongue, man!' I cried fiercely. 'In Heaven's name, what has it to do with you?'

A great wonder showed on his face, then a doubting fear; he came closer to me and whispered so low that I hardly heard: 'What ails you? Is it not well that she should love you?'

'Let me alone,' I cried; 'I'll not answer your questions.'

Kortes stepped back a pace and bowed. I drew myself up and put on my haughtiest air. He was not awed; and I think he perceived some of the truth. 'You made her love you,' he said: 'that does not happen unless a man's own acts help it.'

He said no more. I nodded to him and set forward on my way.

When I arrived at the house, I found Mouraki already at breakfast. He apologized for not having awaited my coming, and then remarked with a smile, 'By the way, Wheatley, you may as well take this; or shall I tear it up?' And he held out to me the document which I had

written and given to Phroso when I restored the island to her.

'She gave you this?' I cried.

'The Lady Phroso? Yes,' said he. 'I had her before me this morning and made her give it up.'

'I can only give it back to her, you know.'

'My dear Wheatley, give it back if you wish. However, until you obtain a Government order you will continue to be Lord of Neopalia.'

'It seems easier to get an island than to get rid of one,' said I.

'It is the case with so many things,' agreed Mouraki: 'lovers, for example. But do I touch delicate ground?' he continued. 'Ah, my dear lord, I find from my reports that in the account you gave me of your experiences you modestly suppressed an incident in which the Lady Phroso was concerned. And I am told,' he added, with his malicious smile, 'that the idea of a Wheatley-Stefanopoulos dynasty is by no means unpopular. I congratulate you on your conquest. She is magnificent; and it was charming of her to make her declaration. That's what has pleased the islanders.'

'It must touch anybody,' said I.

'Ah, I suppose so,' said Mouraki, flicking away the ash of his cigarette. 'I questioned her a little about it this morning.'

'You questioned her?' I could not keep a quiver of anger from my voice.

'Precisely. I have to consider everything,' said he. 'I assure you, my dear Wheatley, that I did it in the most delicate manner possible.'

'And did the lady answer your questions?' I asked carelessly.

'As a matter of fact, my dear Wheatley, the lady said nothing. She chose to take offence. Now, I have to consider this: unmarried she is a danger to the peace of the island; what is the most suitable match for her? I see two possibilities. For the first—yourself!'

I waved my hand and gave an embarrassed laugh.

'The alternative—' He paused, laughed, lit another cigarette. 'The alternative is—myself,' said he.

'You're not serious!' I exclaimed, forcing a smile.

'Absolutely serious,' he asserted. 'I have the misfortune to be a widower, and she is most charming. But all these things require thought. We will talk of them again this afternoon. I have a little business to do now.'

Saying this, he rose and took his way upstairs. I was left alone in the hall. As I sat pondering over Mouraki's last suggestion, a light step sounded on the stair: and the figure that of all figures I least wished to see then, that I rejoiced to see more than any other in the world, appeared before me. Phroso came down. She saw me, and stepped towards me. I rose with a bow. She was very pale, but a smile came on her lips as she murmured a greeting to me and passed on. I rose and followed. Beyond the threshold I overtook her; there we stood again looking on the sea in the distance, as we had looked before. I was seeking what to say.

'I must thank you,' I said. 'It was magnificent.'

The colour suddenly flooded her face.

'You understood?' she murmured. 'You understood why? It seemed the only way; and I think it did help a little.'

'I—I knew, of course, that it was only a—a stratagem,' said I. 'Oh, yes, I knew that directly.'

'You forgive it?'

'Forgive!'

'And you will forget it? I mean, you—' The whisper died into silence.

'So long as I live I will not forget it,' said I, looking into Phroso's eyes, but she turned her head away.

I stood silent beside her. But at that moment there came, from a window above our heads, the sound of a low, amused chuckle. A look of dread spread over Phroso's face.

'Ah, that man!' she exclaimed in an agitated whisper.

'What of him?'

'He has been here before. I have heard him laugh like that when he sent men to death. Ah, he frightens me!' She shuddered. 'He has no pity. My lord, intercede with him for the islanders.'

'Not one shall be hurt if I can help it,' said I, earnestly. 'But have you no fear of him yourself?'

'What can he do to me?' she asked. 'He talked to me this morning about—about you. I hate to talk with him. But what can he do to me? While you were here, I should be safe.'

'As long as you want me, I shall be here,' I assured her.

She raised her eyes to mine; the colour came again to her face.

'As long as you are in any danger,' I added in explanation.

'Ah, yes!' said she, with a sigh; and she went on: 'You are very good to me, my lord; for your island has treated you unkindly, and you will be glad to sail away from it to your home.'

'I would love to stay in it all my life,' said I.

Again the chuckle sounded from the window over our heads. A moment later we heard steps descending the stairs inside the house. Mouraki appeared on the threshold. Phroso had sprung away from me and stood a few paces off. Mouraki stood there smiling—I began to hate the Pasha's smiles—for a moment, and then came forward. He held a bundle of letters, and from it he took one which he held up before me, with a malicious humour twinkling from under his heavy brows.

'I get behindhand in my correspondence when I'm on a voyage,' said he. 'This letter came to Rhodes about a week ago, together with a mass of public papers, and I have only this morning opened it. It concerns you.'

'Who is it from?' I asked. The man's face was full of triumphant spite, and I grew uneasy.

'It is,' said he, 'from our Ambassador in London. He asks how you are getting on in Neopalia.'

'You'll be able to answer him now.'

'Yes. And he will be able to answer some inquiries which he has had.'

I knew what was coming now. Mouraki beamed pleasure. I set my face. At Phroso, who stood near all this while in silence, I dared not look.

'From a certain lady who is most anxious about you.'

'Ah!'

'A Miss Hipgrave—Miss Beatrice Hipgrave.'

'Ah, yes!'

'Who is a friend of yours?'

'Certainly, my dear Pasha.'

'Who is, in fact—let me shake hands—your future wife. A thousand congratulations!'

'Oh, thanks, you're very kind,' said I. 'Yes, she is.'

I pride myself that I played this scene well: I kept a cool careless glance on Mouraki.

But his triumph came from elsewhere. He turned from me to Phroso, and my eyes followed his. She stood rigid, frozen, lifeless; she devoured my face with an appealing gaze. She made no sign and uttered no sound. Mouraki smiled again.

CHAPTER XIV

A SURPRISE FOR MOURAKI

I WAS glad Mouraki had ended a false position into which my weakness had led me: he had rendered it possible for me to serve Phroso in friendship pure and simple; he had decided a struggle which I had failed to decide for myself. It would be easy now for both of us to maintain

that fiction of a good-natured device and leave our innermost feelings unrevealed while we countermined the scheme which the Pasha had in hand. This scheme he proceeded to forward with all the patience and ability of which he was master.

I was left almost entirely alone at the house ; but I could not bring myself to abandon my position and seek my friends on the yacht. Thus passed eight or ten days, and I grew more out of temper and more determined. I waited, the Pasha waited ; he was bent on conquering Phroso. I had a passionate resolve that he should try a fall with me first.

There came a dark stormy evening, with thick close rain and a wind that blew in mournful gusts. I had watched Mouraki go upstairs, and myself had come out of doors again. I strayed a few hundred yards from the house, and turned to look at the light in the Governor's window. A sudden oath escaped from the weary sickness of my heart ; there came an unlooked-for answer at my elbow.

'He acts, you talk, my lord. He works, you are content to curse him. Which will win ?' said a grave voice ; and Kortés's handsome figure was dimly visible in the darkness. 'He works, she weeps, you curse. Who will win ?' he asked again. He drew nearer to me and whispered : 'This morning he told her his purpose ; this evening again—now, while we talk—he is forcing it on her. And what help has she ?'

'She won't let me help her ; she won't let me see her.'

'How can you help her, you who do nothing but curse ?'

'Look here, Kortés,' said I. 'What's in your mind ?'

'You must keep faith with this lady in your own land ?'

'You know of her ?'

'My sister has told me—she who waits on the Lady Euphrosyne.'

'Yes, I must keep faith with her.'

'And with Mouraki ?' he asked.

I caught him eagerly by the arm. I had his idea in a moment.

'No, Kortés. I have no scruples in deceiving Mouraki. But will the Lady Euphrosyne understand?'

'She will understand. You shall see her.'

'You can contrive that?'

'Yes, with my sister's help.'

'Good. When, then?'

'To-night. She will leave him soon.'

'But he watches her to her room.'

'Yes; but you, my lord, know that there is another way.'

'Yes, by the roof. The ladder?'

'It shall be there for you in an hour.'

'And you, Kortés?'

'I'll wait at the foot of it. The Pasha himself should not mount it alive.'

'Your sister will tell her the plan before I come? I couldn't tell her myself.'

'Yes, she shall be told.'

'In an hour, then?'

'Yes.' And without another word, he strode by me. Then I was alone in the darkness again, but with a plan in my head, and no more useless cursings in my mouth. Busily rehearsing the part I was to play, I resumed my quick pacing. The smiles should now be not all the Pasha's.

Soon midnight arrived, and the light in Mouraki's window was extinguished. I passed through the house and into the compound at the back. The ladder was placed ready; Kortés stood beside it. There seemed to be nobody else about. The rain still fell, and the wind whistled.

I mounted the ladder and reached the flat roof. An instant later I found Phroso's hand in mine, and whispered a greeting. She answered with a sob. 'I'm so tired,' she said. 'I have fought him for two hours to-night. Forgive me. I will be brave, my lord.'

I had determined on a cold business-like manner. I went straight to the point.

'You know the plan? You consent to it?' I asked.

'Yes. I think I understand it. It is good of you, my lord. For you may run great danger through me.'

'I do for you what you did not hesitate to do for me,' said I.

'Yes,' said Phroso in a very low whisper.

'You pretended; well then, now I pretend. I think it may succeed. He won't dare to take any extreme steps against me. I don't see how he can prevent our going.'

'He will let us go, you think?'

'How can he refuse? And where will you go?'

'I have some friends at Athens.'

'Good. I'll take you there and—' I paused. 'And leave you there in safety,' I ended in a gruff whisper.

'I shall go to Mouraki to-morrow morning,' I continued, 'and tell him you have agreed to be my wife; that you will come with me under the care of Kortes and his sister, and that we shall be married at the first opportunity.'

'But he knows about—about the lady you love.'

'It won't surprise Mouraki to hear that I am going to break my faith with—the lady I love,' said I.

At that moment I heard below, a voice I knew very well.

'What's the ladder here for, my friend?' it asked.

'It enables one to ascend or descend, my lord,' answered Kortes's grave voice.

'It's Mouraki,' whispered Phroso, and she drew nearer to me.

'Then I will ascend,' said Mouraki.

'A thousand pardons, my lord!'

'Stand aside, sir. What, you dare—'

'Run back to your room,' I whispered. 'Quick. Good-night.' I caught her hand and pressed it. She turned and swiftly disappeared; and I walked to the battlements and looked over.

‘Kortes, Kortes,’ I cried, ‘is it possible that you don’t recognize his Excellency?’

‘Why, Wheatley!’ cried Mouraki.

‘I thought you were in bed,’ said I, as I descended the ladder, ‘and when the cat’s away the mice will play, you know. Well, we’re caught!’

‘Who was with you then?’ he asked, suspicion alive in his crafty eyes.

I took him by the arm and led him into the house. When we reached the hall, I said: ‘Am I not a man of taste? Who should it be?’

He sat down, and a heavy frown gathered on his brow. The spirit of the game had entered into me; I forgot the reality that was so full of pain; I was as merry as though what I told him had been the happy truth.

‘I don’t understand your riddles,’ said Mouraki.

‘Forgive me, I meant to tell you at breakfast to-morrow, but since you surprised our meeting, I’ll tell you now. Congratulate me. That charming girl has owned that her avowal of love for me was the bare truth, and has consented to marry me.’

Mouraki sat motionless in his chair, his eyes cold and sharp on me, his brow puckered. The blow had been a sudden one, and rage mastered him.

‘And Miss Hipgrave?’ he said sneeringly. ‘You’ve changed your mind rapidly, Lord Wheatley.’

He rose suddenly to his feet, and an oath escaped from between his teeth.

‘You shan’t have her,’ said he. ‘You think you can laugh at me: men who think that find out their mistake.’

I laughed. ‘Pardon me,’ said I, ‘but I don’t perceive how we need your permission.’

‘I have some power in Neopalía,’ he reminded me, with a threatening gleam in his eye.

‘No doubt, but the power has to be carefully exercised when British subjects are in question.’

‘I don’t give up what I have resolved upon,’ said he. ‘You don’t know the risk you’re running.’

‘Your Excellency is a great man, no doubt,’ I said, ‘but you can’t afford to carry out these dark designs against a man of my position.’ Then I changed to a more friendly tone, saying, ‘My dear Pasha, had you defeated me, I should have taken it quietly. Would it not be more dignified for you to do the same?’

A long silence followed. I watched his face. Very gradually his brow cleared, his lips relaxed into a smile. He took a step towards me; he held out his hand.

‘Wheatley,’ said he, ‘it is true, I am a fool. I was honestly in love with her. I thought myself safe from you. I allowed my temper to get the better of me. Now my anger is over. Fear nothing. I will be reasonable.’

I murmured grateful thanks.

‘Good-night, good-night,’ said he. ‘You’re sure you forgive my hasty words?’

‘From the bottom of my heart,’ said I earnestly.

Mouraki began to mount the stairs. He turned his head and said:

‘How will you settle with Miss Hipgrave?’

‘I must beg her forgiveness, as I must yours,’ said I.

‘I hope you’ll be equally successful,’ said he, with a smile.

‘Now,’ said I, sitting down, ‘he’s gone to think how he can get my throat cut without a scandal.’

In fact, Mouraki and I were beginning to understand one another.

CHAPTER XV

A STRANGÉ ESCAPE

YES, Mouraki was very dangerous. His designs against me would be limited only by the fact that I was a known man, and could not disappear without excuse. I congratulated myself that a revolver and cartridges were again in my possession. These, and open eyes, were the

best treatment for the sudden fatal disease that threatened inconvenient lives in Neopalía.

Looking back, I wonder whether the Governor spent much of the night in his bed. I incline to think that he had a very active night, full of strange meetings, of schemes and bargainings. However of that I knew nothing at the time, and it was a surprise at breakfast next morning, to find him surrounded by officers. There was a stir in the hall. Orders were being given.

‘My dear lord,’ cried Mouraki, turning towards me with every sign of vexation on his face, ‘I am terribly annoyed. These careless fellows of mine have let your friend Constantine slip through their fingers.’

‘Constantine escaped!’ I exclaimed in genuine surprise and vexation.

‘Alas, yes! The sentry fell asleep. It seems that the prisoner had friends, and they got him out by the window. I have been having the island scoured for him; but he’s not to be found.’

‘Have you looked in the cottage where his wife is?’

‘Yes, it has been searched. In vain! It is now so closely guarded that nobody can get in. If he ventures there we shall have him to a certainty. But, excuse me, I have some more orders to give.’

As I ate my breakfast, I became very thoughtful concerning this escape of Constantine. Whether Mouraki’s account were the whole truth, or something lay unrevealed, at least I knew that the escape meant that another enemy, and a bitter one, was loosed against me. I had fought Constantine, I had challenged Mouraki the night before: was I to have them both against me? And would it be two against one, or all against all? Somehow I had a presentiment that it would be two against one.

After breakfast I went into the open air. There were no signs of Phroso. Kortes was not to be seen either. It was a bright hot day; the waves danced blue in the sun, while a light breeze blew from the land. If Constantine

had found a boat, the wind was fair to carry him away to safety. But had he? I glanced up at the cottage in the woods above me. A thought struck me. I could run up there and down again in a few moments.

I made my way quickly to the house and into the compound behind. Here, to my delight, I found Kortes. He told me he had heard the news.

'I'm going to see if I can get a look into the cottage,' said I.

'I'm told it is guarded, my lord. Run no risks, my lord. The Lady Euphrosyne has only you and me.'

'And my friends. I'm going to send them word to be on the look-out for any summons from me.'

'Then send it at once,' he counselled. 'You may delay, Mouraki will not.'

'I'll send it directly I come back,' said I, and I climbed up the wall, and started at a quick walk through the wood. I met nobody till I was almost at the cottage. Then I came suddenly on a sentry; the cottage seemed ringed round with watchful figures. The man barred my way.

'But I am going to see the lady—Madame Stefanopoulos,' I protested.

'I have orders to let nobody pass,' he answered. 'I will call the officer.'

The officer came. He was full of regrets, but his Excellency's orders were absolute. Nobody was allowed to enter the cottage.

The barrier round the place was impregnable. Slowly and reluctantly, with a conviction that I was turning away baffled from the heart of the mystery, I retraced my steps down the hill. I believed that the strict guard was to prevent my intrusion and mine alone; that the Pasha's search for Constantine was a pretence; in short, that Constantine was at that moment in the cottage, with the knowledge of Mouraki and under his protection. But I could not prove my suspicions, and I could not unravel the Pasha's plan. I had an uneasy sense of fighting in the dark.

I passed through the house. All was quiet, nobody was about. It was now the middle of the afternoon, and I sat down and wrote a note to Denny, bidding him to be on the alert day and night, and to have the yacht ready to start at a moment's notice. I finished my note, and strolled out in front of the house, looking for somebody to act as my messenger.

Standing there, I raised my eyes and looked down to the harbour. At what I saw, I uttered an oath of surprise and dismay. Smoke poured from the funnel of the yacht. See, she moved! She made for the mouth of the harbour. She set her course for the sea. Where was she going? She must not go. It was vital that she should stay ready for me by the jetty. Without an instant's delay, I began to run, as a man runs for his life, along the road towards the town. I reached the jetty, and there I sank exhausted against the wooden fencing, for the yacht was hard on a mile out to sea and putting yards and yards between herself and me at every moment. Again I sprang up and waved my handkerchief. Denny was far out of my reach. What possessed the boy?

I turned from watching, sick at heart; and, as I turned, a boy ran up to me and thrust a letter into my hand, saying: 'The gentleman on the yacht left this for my lord. I was about to carry it up when I saw my lord run through the street, and I followed him back.'

The letter bore Denny's handwriting. I tore it open with eager fingers.

'Dear Charley,' it ran, 'I don't know what your game is, but it's pretty slow for us. So we're off fishing. Old Mouraki has been uncommonly civil, and sent a fellow with us to show us the best place. If the weather is decent we shall stay out a couple of nights, so you may look for us the day after to-morrow. I knew it was no good asking you to come. Be a good boy, and don't get into mischief while I'm away. Of course Mouraki will catch Constantine again in no time. He told us he had no doubt of it, unless the fellow had found a boat. I'll

run up to the house as soon as we get back. Yours ever, D.'

The Pasha had got rid of the unsuspecting Denny in the easiest manner possible. Indeed it was 'uncommonly civil' of Mouraki!

Slowly I retraced my way up the hill. Back at the house, I found Mouraki waiting for me in the doorway. He was smiling.

'My dear lord,' he cried, 'I could have spared you a tiresome walk. I thought your friends would certainly have told you of their intention, or I would have mentioned it myself.'

'My dear Pasha,' I rejoined, no less cordially, 'I knew their intention, but it struck me suddenly that I would go with them, and I ran down to try and catch them. Unfortunately I was too late.'

Mouraki understood, not that I was trying to deceive him, but that I was informing him politely that he had not succeeded in deceiving me.

'I hear,' he observed with a laugh, 'that you have been trying to pass my sentries and look for our runaway on your own account. You really shouldn't expose yourself to such risks. The man might kill you.'

'Then Constantine is at the cottage?' I cried quickly.

'At the cottage? Oh, dear, no. Of course I have searched that.'

I suppose I appeared unconvinced, for Mouraki caught me by the arm, cried, 'What an unbeliever! Come, you shall go with me and see for yourself.'

If he took me, of course I should find nothing. The bird would be flown by now. But I reflected that Kortès was guarding Phroso, and therefore I could go without uneasiness. 'Well, let's walk up the hill then,' said I carelessly. 'Though I assure you you're giving yourself needless trouble.'

He would not listen, and we passed through the house. Mouraki had caused a ladder to be placed against the bank of rock; before mounting it, he asked, 'Have

you had any conversation with our fair friend this afternoon ? ’

‘ The Lady Phroso ? No. She has not made an appearance. I fancied, Pasha, you were not over-anxious that I should have a conversation with her.’

‘ You wrong me,’ he said earnestly. ‘ Indeed you wrong me. To prove it, you shall see her alone the moment we return. I am going to search again for Constantine myself this evening with a strong party ; then you shall be at perfect liberty to talk with her.’

‘ I’m infinitely obliged ; you’re too generous.’

He began to climb up and I followed him, asking of my puzzled brain, ‘ Now, what does he mean by that ? ’

I did not know whether this generous offer of his hid some new design. Well, it was little use wondering. At least I should see Phroso. Perhaps—a sudden thought seized me, and I—

‘ What makes you look so excited ? ’ asked the Pasha. His eyes were on my face, his lips curved in a smile.

‘ I’m not excited,’ said I. But the blood was leaping in my veins. I had an idea.

CHAPTER XVI

AN UNFINISHED LETTER

THERE were hope and exultation in my heart as I followed the Governor through the wood to the cottage. Mouraki, I said to myself, thought that he was allaying my suspicions by the courtesy with which he arranged an interview between Phroso and myself. Was that what he was really doing ? No, I declared triumphantly. He was putting in my way the one chance which fate hitherto had

denied. He was to be away, and most of his men with him. Phroso, Kortes, and I would be alone together at the house for an hour, perhaps for two. Had the Pasha never heard of the secret of the Stefanopouloi? It almost seemed so; but I myself had told him of it. Yet he was leaving us alone by the hidden door. Had he remembered it? Had he stopped it? My face fell. He knew; he could not have forgotten; the passage would certainly be blocked or watched. These reflections occupied my mind till we reached the cottage. There were no lights showing, and the curtains of the windows were drawn.

'Shall we go in?' asked Mouraki. 'Stay, though, I'll knock on the door. Madame Stefanopoulos is, no doubt, within. I think she will probably not have joined her husband.'

The Pasha knocked. He waited and then knocked again. No answer came.

'Well,' he said, 'we have given her fair warning. Let us enter.'

'But if Constantine's here?' I suggested, with a mocking smile. 'Your life is a valuable one. Run no risks; he's a desperate man.'

The Pasha smiled in answer to my smile, and produced a revolver.

'You're wise,' said I, and I took my revolver out of my pocket.

The Pasha opened the door and passed in. Nothing seemed changed since my last visit. The door of the room on the right was open; the left-hand door was shut.

'You see the fugitive is not in that room,' observed the Pasha. 'Let us try the other,' and he turned the door-handle of the room on the left, and preceded me into it.

'I see nobody,' said the Pasha. 'But the room is dark. Shall I pull back the curtain?'

He stepped across the room towards the curtain.

Suddenly I became vaguely, uncomfortably, even terribly conscious of something there. I could see nothing

in the dark room, and I heard nothing, yet my forehead grew damp with sweat.

Mouraki's hand was on the curtain. He drew it back. The dull evening light spread through the room. Mouraki turned.

'Do you see anyone anywhere?' said he.

I pulled myself together, and looked round. Away in the corner of the room, in the shadow, I saw a figure seated in front of a table. On the table were writing materials. The figure was a woman's. It was Madame Stefanopoulos. Her arms were spread on the table, and her head lay between them. I raised my hand and pointed to her.

'There,' I said, 'there—between the shoulders! A knife! She's dead.'

I had caught Mouraki by the arm, and I felt him tremble. I must do him justice. I am convinced that he did not foresee this among the results of the letting loose of Constantine Stefanopoulos. I turned from him to the motionless figure in the chair.

'Let us lay her here on the sofa,' I said. 'You must send some one to look after her.'

He seemed reluctant to help me. I leant forward alone, and raised her from the table, and set her upright in the chair. I rejoiced to find no trace of pain or horror on her face. As I looked at her I gave a sudden short sob. I was unstrung; the thing was so wantonly cruel and horrible.

'He has made good use of his liberty,' I said, turning on Mouraki in sudden anger against the hand that had set the villain free. The Pasha understood the implied taunt, but he answered calmly: 'We have no proof yet that it was her husband who killed her.'

'Who else should?'

He shrugged his shoulders, remarking, 'Perhaps he did, perhaps not. We don't know.'

'Help me with her,' said I brusquely.

Between us we lifted her and laid her on the couch, and spread a rug over her.

‘I’ll send a couple of women up as soon as we get back,’ Mouraki said. ‘Meanwhile the place is guarded and nobody can come in. Need we delay longer?’

Mouraki’s hand was on the door-handle. He stood there, waiting for me to accompany him. But with a sudden exclamation I darted across the room to the table. I had perceived a sheet of paper lying just where Francesca’s head had rested. A pen lay between it and the inkstand. On the paper was a line or two of writing. I held it up. Mouraki stepped briskly across to me.

‘Give it to me,’ he said, holding out his hand. ‘It may be something I ought to see.’

‘I’ll read it to you,’ said I. ‘There isn’t much of it.’ I held it to the light, and read aloud, ‘My lord, take care. He is free. Mouraki has set—’

That was all: a blot followed the last word. At that word the pen must have fallen from her fingers as her husband’s dagger stole her life. He had caught her in the act of writing it, taken his revenge, and secured his safety.

After I had read, there was silence. At last I turned and looked the Pasha in the face, and I think my eyes told him pretty plainly my views of the meaning of the note. He answered my glance at first with an inexpressive gaze; but presently a meaning came into his eyes. He seemed to confess to me and to challenge me to make what use I could of the confession. But the next instant blankness spread over his face again.

The finding of the note tore away the last pretences of good faith and friendliness which had been kept up between us. In that swift, full, open glance which we had exchanged, the great issue between us was plainly read. Yet not a word passed our lips concerning it.

I put the note in my pocket, and followed Mouraki out of the house. He beckoned to the sentry and told him that two women were to be admitted, but nobody else; he then resumed his way down, maintaining absolute silence. I did not care to talk. I had enough to think

about. Mouraki had set Constantine free, that Constantine might do against me what Mouraki himself could not do openly. My friends were away. The hour of the stroke must even now be upon me. Well, the hour of my counter-stroke was come also, the counter-stroke for which my interview with Phroso and Mouraki's absence opened the way.

We reached the house and entered the hall together. The Pasha seated himself and wrote a note. He looked up, saying: 'I am informing the Lady Euphrosyne that you will await her here in half-an-hour's time, and that she is at liberty to spend what time she pleases with you.'

'I am obliged to you, your Excellency.'

He called an officer and said, 'On no account allow Lord Wheatley to be interrupted this evening. You will keep sentries on guard behind and in front of the house, but do not let them intrude here.'

After giving his orders, the Pasha rose from his chair and completed his preparations for going out.

'We shall meet early to-morrow, I expect,' he said, 'and then we must settle this matter. Do I understand that you are resolved not to yield?'

'I am absolutely resolved,' said I, and at the sight of his calm sneering face my temper suddenly got the better of me. 'Yes, I'm resolved. You can do what you like. You can bribe ruffians to assassinate me, as I believe you've bribed Constantine.'

He started at that.

'The blood of that unhappy woman is on your head,' I cried vehemently. 'If a like fate befalls me, the blame of that will be on your head also. It is you, and not your tool, who will be responsible.'

'Responsible!' he echoed. 'So be it. I shall be responsible. Where will you be?' He paused, smiling, and ended, 'And where Phroso?'

My self-restraint was exhausted. I sprang up. In another moment my hands would have been on his throat. But he had moved towards the door while he had been

speaking to me ; as I sprang at him, a quick movement of his hand opened it, a rapid twist of his body removed him from my reach. The door was shut in my face.

His steps died away outside, and all was very still. I looked round the hall ; there was nobody but myself. Hope rose in my heart, as my eyes fell on the spot under the staircase, where lay the entrance to the secret passage. I looked at my watch ; it was eleven o'clock. The time was come, the time left free by Mouraki's strange oversight.

It was then and then only that a sudden chilling suspicion fell upon me. Was Mouraki Pasha the man to be guilty of so plain an oversight ? When an enemy leaves open an obvious retreat, is it always by oversight ? When he seems to indicate a way of safety, is the way safe ? These disturbing thoughts crowded on me, and I looked now at the entrance to the secret passage with new eyes.

The sentries were behind the house, the sentries were in front of the house ; in neither direction was any chance of escape. One way only was open—the passage. And I asked myself, ' Is this way a trap ? '

For if that way were a trap, then there was no way of safety, and the last hope was gone.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE JAWS OF THE TRAP

I SAT for some moments in stupefied despair. The fall from hope was so sudden, the revelation of my blind folly so cruel. But this mood did not last long. Soon I was busy thinking again. Before the yacht came back, Mouraki would try to settle the matter once for all.

Therefore I could not wait. The passage might be a trap. True ; but the house was a prison. I had rather meet my fate in a struggle than wait for it tamely here in my chair. Would Phroso come with me ? If she would, it might be that Kortes and I might by some chance bring her safe out of Mouraki's hands. By now I was more than ready to kill Mouraki if only I could come at him.

I knew where to find Kortes. I went to the foot of the stairs and called softly. Kortes came down to me at once, and I asked him about Phroso.

'She is alone in her room, my lord,' he answered.

I asked his opinion as to waiting where we were, or essaying the way that Mouraki's suspicious carelessness seemed to leave open to us.

'Oh, the passage, my lord ! For you and me the passage is very dangerous, yet hardly more than here, and the Lady Phroso has her only chance of escape through the passage.'

'And at the other end ?'

'There may be a boat. If there is none, we must try to steal round to the town, and hide in one of the houses till a boat can be found. I do not say escape is likely. It is possible only.'

During this conversation Kortes had been standing on the lowest step of the staircase, and I facing him, on the floor of the hall. Suddenly a sound struck on my ear, a very little sound. I caught my companion's arm, silencing him by a look. The sound came again. I knew the sound ; I had heard it before. I stepped back and looked round the balustrade to the spot where the entrance to the passage lay.

I sprang back with a cry of wonder, almost of alarm, for in the opening of the door were the head and shoulders of a man. His face was hardly a yard from my face ; and the face was the face of Constantine Stefanopoulos.

In an instant the explanation flashed like lightning through my brain. Constantine, buying his liberty and pardon from Mouraki, had stolen along the passage. He

opened the door. He hoped to find me alone in the hall. Then a single shot would be enough. His errand would be done. That my explanation was right the revolver in his hand witnessed. But he also was surprised. I was closer than he thought, so close that he started back for an instant. Before he could raise his weapon and take aim, I put my head down and rushed at him. I think my head knocked his arm up; his revolver went off, the noise echoing through the hall. I almost had hold of him when I was suddenly seized from behind and hurled backwards. Kortes had a mind to come first. But in the instant that he was free, Constantine dived down, like a rat into a hole. He disappeared; with a shout Kortes sprang after him. I heard the feet of both of them clattering down the flight of steps.

In a second I also was down the flight of stairs. I still heard the footsteps in front of me, but I could see nothing. I ran on, but suddenly I paused, for now there were steps behind me also. Then a voice cried, in terror and distress, 'My lord, don't leave me, my lord!'

I turned. Even in the deep gloom I saw a gleam of white: a moment later I caught Phroso by both her hands.

'The shot, the shot?' she whispered.

'Constantine. He shot at me—no, I'm not hurt. Kortes is after him.'

'I heard it and rushed down,' she panted.

'I must go and help Kortes.'

'Not without me.' Her arms tightly held me by the shoulders. She would not let me go. Well, then, we must face it together.

'Come along, then,' said I.

Suddenly, from in front of us, a cry rang out; it was some distance off. We started towards it, for it was Kortes's voice. The dark water was below us, and before us the bridge of rock that spanned the pool.

Straining my eyes, I discerned, beyond the centre of the bridge, a writhing mass, two men, twisted about one

another in an embrace which could have no end but death. Which was Kortes, which Constantine, I could not tell. I dared not fire.

Backward and forward, to and fro, up and down they writhed and rolled. Now they hung over the black gulf on this side, now on that. Now the mass separated a little as one pressed the other downward and seemed about to hurl his enemy over ; now that one, in his turn, tottered on the edge ; again they were mixed together, so that I could not tell which was which. Then suddenly, from both at once, rang out cries : there was dread and surprise in one, fierce self-forgetful triumph in the other. Not even for Phroso's sake could I rest longer. Freeing myself from her grasp, I rushed on to the bridge, and moved warily along its narrow perilous way. But even as I came near the two who fought in the middle, there was a deep groan, a second wild triumphant cry, a great lurch of the mass, a moment when it hung poised over the yawning gulf ; and then an instant of utter stillness. Next came a great resounding splash and I saw the dark gleam of the agitated water. Then all was still again ; and the passage of the bridge was clear.

I walked to the spot where the struggle had been, and whence the two had fallen together. I knelt down and gazed into the chasm. Three times I called Kortes's name. No answer came up. I could discern no movement of the dark waters. They had sunk, the two together, and neither rose. My heart was heavy for Kortes, a brave true man and our only friend. In the death of Constantine I saw less than his fitting punishment. He was well dead, and his wife well avenged.

But it was fatal to linger here. I walked briskly back to where I had left Phroso. I found her lying on the ground ; she seemed to be in a faint. With a heavy sigh she opened her eyes and shuddered.

'It is over,' I said. 'There's no need to be afraid ; all is over now.'

'Constantine ?'



NOW THEY HUNG OVER THE BLACK GULF ON THIS SIDE,
NOW ON THAT

'He is dead.'

'And Kortes?'

'They are both gone. They fell together into the pool and must be dead.'

A frightened sob was her answer. 'Ah, dear Kortes!' she whispered, and I heard her sob gently again.

'He was a brave man,' said I. 'God rest his soul!'

'He loved me,' she said simply, between her sobs. 'He was a true friend.'

'You have other friends,' said I, and my voice was well-nigh as low as hers.

'You are very good to me, my lord,' she said, and she conquered her sobs and lay still.

'We mustn't stay here,' said I. 'Our only chance is to go on. Can you walk, Phroso?'

I hardly noticed the name I called her, nor did she appear to heed it.

'I can't go,' she moaned. 'I—I can't cross that awful bridge.'

'Oh yes, you can,' said I. 'Come along.' I stooped and lifted her in my arms.

'Keep still while we're on the bridge,' said I to Phroso. She kept absolutely still. It was fortunate; for to cross that bridge in the dark, carrying a lady, was not a job I cared much about. However, we came to the other side; the walls of rock closed in again, and I felt the way begin to slope downwards under my feet.

The road had many turns in it, and I had often to ask Phroso the way. She gave me directions at once. Evidently she was thoroughly familiar with the track. When I remarked on this she said, 'Oh, yes, I often used to come this way. It leads to such a pretty cave.'

'Then it doesn't come out at the same point as the way my friends took?'

'No, more than a mile away from that. We must be nearly there now.'

Soon I saw a glimmer of light which danced before my eyes at the end of a long straight tunnel. We were going

down rapidly now ; and, hark, there was the wash of water welcoming us to the light of the upper world ; for day had just dawned as we came to the end of the way.

The end was near. Another five minutes brought us where once again the enfolding walls spread out. The path broadened into a stony beach ; above us the rocks formed an arch ; we were in a little cave, and the waves rolled gently on the beach. The mouth of the cave was narrow and low ; there was just room for a boat to pass. Phroso sprang from my arms, and stretched out her hands to the light.

‘ Ah, if we had a boat ! ’ I cried, running to the water’s edge.

I had hardly spoken when Phroso suddenly clapped her hands and cried : ‘ A boat ! There is a boat, my lord,’ and she leapt forward her eyes sparkling.

It was true ! A little fishing boat lay on the shingle, with its sculls lying in it. How had it come ? Well, I didn’t stop to ask that. My eyes met Phroso’s in delight. The joy of our happy fortune overcame us.

‘ Isn’t it wonderful ? ’ cried Phroso. ‘ Ah, my lord, all goes well with you.’

Without wasting time, I helped her into the boat, then I launched it ; when it floated clear on the water of the cave I jumped in. I struck the water with the sculls and the boat moved. We reached the mouth of the cave.

Soon we were outside. There rose a straight rock on the left hand, ending in a level top some four feet above our heads. And from the top of the rock came a laugh that I knew well. I did not look up : I looked still at Phroso. As I looked, her colour fled and fright leapt into her eyes. I knew the truth from her face.

‘ Very nice ! But what have you done with Cousin Constantine ? ’ asked Mouraki Pasha.

The trap, then, had double jaws, and we had escaped Constantine only to fall into the hands of his master. It was so like Mouraki. I was so much aghast and yet so

little surprised, the fall was so sudden, our defeat so ludicrous, that I smiled, as I turned my eyes to the Pasha.

‘ I might have known it, you know,’ said I, aloud.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN UNKNOWN FRIEND

THE boat still moved from my last stroke, and we floated slowly past Mouraki standing on the rock. Phroso sat with downcast eyes ; the Pasha answered my smile with his own. The boat drew past the rock, and, as we came round its end, I found across our path a large boat, manned by four of Mouraki’s soldiers, who had laid down their oars and sat, rifles in hand. In the steersman’s place was Demetri. It seemed strange to find him in that company. One of the soldiers took hold of the nose of our boat and turned it round, thrusting it towards the beach. A moment later we grounded on the shingle, where the Pasha stood awaiting us. I sprang from the boat, and helped Phroso to land. Then I turned to the Pasha.

‘ I think,’ said I, ‘ that you’ll have to wait a day or two for Cousin Constantine. I’m told that bodies don’t find their way out so soon as living men.’

‘ Ah, I thought that must be it ! You threw him down into the pool ? ’ he asked.

‘ No, not I. My friend Kortes.’

‘ And Kortes ? ’

‘ They fell together. They must both be dead. Forgive me, Pasha, but I don’t understand your motive. We were in your power at the house. Why not have done then what I presume you will do now ? ’

'My dear lord,' said he, glancing round to see that nobody listened, 'yesterday you had not committed the offences of which you have now been guilty.'

'The offences, Pasha?'

'Yes,' said Mouraki, 'the offences of aiding my prisoner—that lady—to escape, and—well, the death of Constantine is at least a matter for inquiry. I was sure that if Constantine failed in his last crime, you would make for the passage.'

Mouraki had now plainly told me that he had employed Constantine to assassinate me: he had plainly exposed to me the trick by which he had obtained an accusation against me. Now to whom does a man like Mouraki Pasha reveal such things as these? Why only to men who will tell no tales. And the proverb says the only men of that kind are dead men. That was why I found significance in the Governor's frankness. I believe the man followed my thoughts, for he smiled again as he said: 'I don't mind being frank with you, my dear Wheatley. I'm sure you won't use the little admissions I may seem to make against me.'

He turned suddenly from me and called to his men. Three came up at once. 'This gentleman,' he said, 'is in your custody. Don't let him move.'

I seated myself on a rock; the three men stood round me. The Pasha walked to where Phroso sat, and began to speak with her. But his back was towards me, and I did not hear anything that he said.

Up to this time the fourth soldier and Demetri had remained in the boat. They now landed and hauled the boat up on the beach; then they turned to the smaller boat. The soldier was preparing to haul it also out of the water, but Demetri said something to him. The soldier nodded in assent, and they left the boat where it was, merely attaching it by a rope to the other. Then they walked to the rocks and sat down at a little distance from where I was, Demetri taking bread and cheese and a large knife from his pocket and beginning

to cut and eat. I looked at him, but he refused to meet my eye.

Demetri finished his meal, and began to clean his knife, polishing its blade lovingly on the palm of his hand, feeling its point with his thumb. He hummed contentedly to himself. I recognized the tune; it was the song that the bard wrote on the death of Stefan Stefanopoulos two hundred years ago.

I strained my ears to hear what the Pasha was saying to Phroso; I could not catch the words, but a soft pleading murmur came from Phroso, a short relentless laugh from Mouraki. Then he turned and came across to me.

'A beautiful thing, my dear lord,' said he, in French, so that the soldiers might not understand, 'is the devotion of women. This lady here is so attached to you that I believe she will marry me, purely to ensure your safety.'

'I hope she'll do nothing of the sort,' said I.

'She'll be compelled to marry me anyhow,' he answered. 'But it will be a comfort to her if I pretend that she is thereby saving you. There have been quite a number of pretences lately,' he continued. 'For example, Lord Wheatley, there was a pretence that I was grieved at Constantine's escape.'

'And another that you were anxious to re-capture him.'

'Ah, yes, yes,' he laughed. 'And there is to be one more pretence, my dear lord.'

'I believe I can guess it,' said I, 'though not its precise form.'

'Well, Constantine was in favour of a fever. He told me that it was the usual device in Neopalía.'

'You can call it what you like, Pasha,' I said.

'Don't you think that the outraged patriotism of Neopalía—?' he suggested, with a smile. 'You bought the island—you, a stranger! It was very rash. These islanders are desperate fellows. There's one, for instance, whom I ought to hang.'

‘Ah!’ My eye wandered towards where Demetri hummed and polished.

‘And who has certainly not earned his life merely by bringing me to meet you this morning.’

‘Demetri?’ I asked with a careless air.

‘Well, yes, Demetri,’ smiled the Pasha. ‘Demetri is very open to reason.’

Across our talk came Demetri’s happy humming. The Pasha heard it. ‘Demetri does not really love me, I think,’ said he. ‘I hanged his brother three years ago, and he went to the gallows humming that tune. You know it?’

‘Very well indeed, Pasha.’

I looked past the Pasha and past the four soldiers—for the last had now joined his comrades—to Phroso. She was leaning against the cliff side; her eyes were closed. I think she had sunk into a half-unconscious state.

The little bay in which we were, was surrounded by steep cliffs, except in one place. Here there was a narrow cleft in the rocks, and the ground sloped gradually upwards from the beach. On this spot Demetri sat, and the Pasha, having amused himself with me, walked up to Demetri. The fellow sprang to his feet and saluted with great respect. Mouraki beckoned to him to come nearer, and began to speak to him.

I sat still under the bayonets of the soldiers, who faced me and had their backs to their commander. My eyes were fixed steadily on the pair who stood conversing on the slope; and my mind was in a ferment. The Pasha’s conversation brought back to my mind a remark of Kortes about an oath Demetri had sworn to avenge the death of his brother. I read my only chance of life in the caprice of the wild passionate barbarian who stood with head meekly bowed and knife carelessly dangled in his hand. In his blood-feud with the Pasha, in his revengeful wrath, lay my chance. I glanced at Phroso’s motionless figure; I glanced at the little boat that floated on the water (why had Demetri not beached it?); I glanced

at the rope which bound it to the other boat ; I measured the distance between the boats and myself ; I felt the blade of the knife in my pocket.

Mouraki spoke and smiled. His eyes moved towards me. Demetri's eyes followed his. The Pasha spoke again. Demetri shook his head, and Mouraki evidently sought to persuade him. The Pasha took him by the arm, and they went a few paces further up the slope, so as to be more private in their talk—but was that the object with both of them ? Still Demetri shook his head. The Pasha's mouth grew stern, and he frowned. He spoke in short sharp sentences. Demetri seemed to plead. He looked uneasy, he shifted from foot to foot, he drew back, as though he would fain escape. Mouraki followed him in his retreat, step by step.

My eyes grew weary with intent watching. I rubbed my eyes to clear my vision, and looked again. Yes, the two figures were still a little further off than when I had looked before. It could not be by chance and unintentionally that Demetri constantly gave back a pace, luring the Pasha to follow him. No, there was a plan in his head ; and my heart suddenly beat fast with hope. Now, as I gazed, for an instant came the swiftest message from Demetri's eyes. I knew its meaning. I sat where I was, but every muscle of my body was tense in readiness for that desperate leap, and every nerve quivered with excitement. Now, now ! Was it now ? I longed to cry ' Strike ! ' but I held the word in and still gazed. And the soldiers leant easily on their bayonets, exchanging a word or two, yawning sometimes, weary of their job ; of what was going on behind their backs, on the slope of the cliff, they took no heed.

Ah, there was a change now ! Demetri had ceased to protest and to retreat. Mouraki's frowns had vanished : he smiled again in satisfaction and approval. Demetri threw a glance at me. Mouraki spoke, Demetri answered. Now Mouraki, in condescending recognition of a good servant, stepped close up to Demetri and, raising his hand,

reached round the fellow's shoulder and patted him approvingly on the back.

'It will be now!' I thought, and I drew my legs up under me and grasped the hidden knife in my pocket.

Mouraki patted, laughed, evidently praised. Demetri bowed his head. But his bare, brown right arm that had hung so long idle by his side—the arm whose hand held the great bright blade so lovingly polished—the arm began slowly and cautiously to crawl up his side. It bent at the elbow; then, quick as lightning, it flew above Demetri's head, the blade sparkled in the sun, the hand swooped down, and the steel sunk into the body of Mouraki. With a sudden cry of amazement and of agony, the Pasha staggered and fell prone on the rocky ground; and Demetri cried, 'At last, my God, at last!' and laughed aloud.

CHAPTER XIX

BACK TO NEOPALIA

THE death-cry of Mouraki Pasha set us all moving. The sound of it turned the soldiers' weary idling into an amazed wonder, and then into fierce excitement. Phroso leapt with a shriek to her feet. I hurled myself across the space between me and the rope, knife in hand. The soldiers, with a shout of rage, rushed wildly up the slope to where Demetri stood knife in hand. The rope parted under my impetuous assault. Phroso was by my side; in an instant we were in the boat; I pushed off. I seized the sculls; but then I hesitated. Was not this man my friend, my ally? I looked up the slope. Demetri stood by the body of Mouraki. The four soldiers rushed towards

him. I must not run away now. I pushed the sculls into Phroso's hands. But she threw her arms about me, crying, 'No, no, my lord!' For a moment I could not free myself from her embrace.

The moment was enough. Demetri did not try to defend himself. He stood still as a statue, a smile on his lips. The bayonets flashed and buried themselves in Demetri's body. He sank with a groan. Again the blades, drawn back, were driven into him. The soldiers ceased, and stood for an instant, regarding the two bodies. Then I loosed Phroso's arms, took the sculls, and set to with a will. Where we were to go, or what help we could look for, I did not know; but a fever to be away from the place had come on me.

A moment passed. I pulled with all my strength. Phroso's voice came, low but urgent: 'They move; they're coming down to the shore. Ah, my lord, they're taking aim! No, they've stopped. They're running to the boat now. They're getting in.'

I was wondering why they had not used their rifles. Perhaps they, mere humble soldiers, shrank from the responsibility, now that their leader, whose protection would have held them harmless, lay dead.

'They're launching the boat. They're in now,' came in Phroso's breathless whisper. 'They're rowing hard. They're gaining,' she cried. 'Oh, they're gaining! On, my lord, on!'

'How many are rowing?'

'Three, my lord, each with two oars.'

'It's no good, Phroso,' said I. 'The game's up;' and I rested on my oars and began to pant. I was not in training for a race.

The boat containing the soldiers drew near. We awaited their coming, Phroso with a despairing look in her eyes. Their boat came alongside of ours. I touched Phroso's hand.

'Courage,' said I. 'The braver we look, the better we shall come off.' Then I turned to the pursuers and

regarded them steadily, waiting for them to speak. The man who was steering—he appeared to be a subordinate officer—covered me with his rifle.

‘You’re trying to escape,’ said he.

‘What right have you to stop me?’ I demanded.

‘You were our prisoner, my lord,’ said the officer. ‘We cannot allow you to escape. And this lady was a prisoner also.’

‘Well, what do you want of us?’ I asked.

‘You must accompany us back to Neopalia.’

‘Very well,’ said I. ‘But are you going to leave the Pasha there? Does it suit the dignity of Mouraki Pasha to lie untended on the shore, while his men row off to the harbour? You, four of you, allow one man to kill him, and then you leave his body as if it were the body of a dog!’

I had no definite reason for wishing them to return and take up Mouraki’s body; but every moment gained was something. Neopalia had bred in me a constant hope of new chances.

The officer held a consultation with the other soldiers. Then he said: ‘It is true, my lord. It is more fitting that we should carry the body back; but you must return with us.’

‘With all my heart,’ said I, taking up my scull.

The officer laid his rifle in readiness across his knees; both boats turned, and we set out again for the beach. When we reached it, three of them went up the slope. Then they raised Mouraki and began to carry him down, leaving Demetri’s body where it lay.

I was standing on the beach near the larger of the two boats in which the soldiers were about to lay Mouraki’s body. Having nothing to cover his body with, they removed his coat and left it lying for an instant on the shingle while they lifted him in. Two of them then got into the smaller boat in which Phroso sat, and I was about to follow them when I perceived a pocket-book lying on the shingle: it must have belonged to Mouraki and have

fallen from his coat. It lay opened now, face upwards. I stooped for it, intending to give it to the officer. But an instant later it was in my pocket ; and I saw that my guards had not detected my swift action. Then I stepped into the boat. Phroso was in the stern. I crouched down low in the bows behind the backs of the soldiers ; there I took out Mouraki's pocket-book and opened it, for, as the book lay open on the shore, I had seen my name in it.

Stealthily I drew out a slip of paper ; behind that was another slip, and again a third. They were three short paragraphs cut from a Greek newspaper. My name headed each of them. I set myself to read with much interest.

The first paragraph ran : ' We regret to hear that Lord Wheatley, the English nobleman who has recently purchased the island of Neopalía and taken up his residence there, is suffering from a severe attack of the fever which is at the present time prevalent in the island.'

I turned to the second cutting. ' We greatly regret to announce that Lord Wheatley's condition is critical. The fever has decreased but the patient is dangerously weak.'

The last paragraph was extremely brief. ' Lord Wheatley died at seven o'clock yesterday morning.'

I lay back in the bows of the boat, holding these remarkable little slips of paper in my hand. Then I replaced them in the pocket-book, and I looked in the inner compartment. It held only a single piece of paper. On the paper were four or five lines, not in print this time but in handwriting, and the handwriting looked very much like Mouraki's.

' Report of Lord Wheatley's death unfounded. Reason to suspect intended foul play on the part of the islanders. The Governor is making inquiries. Lord Wheatley is carefully guarded, as attempts on his life are feared. Feeling in the island is much exasperated, the sale to Lord Wheatley being very unpopular.'

'There's another compartment yet,' said I to myself, and I turned to it eagerly. Alas, I was disappointed! There was a sheet of paper in it, but the paper was a blank. Yet I looked at the blank piece of paper with even greater interest; for I had little doubt that it had been intended to carry another message, a message which was true and no lie, which was to have been written this very morning by the dagger of Demetri. Something like this it would have run, 'Lord Wheatley assassinated this morning. Assassin killed by Governor's guards. Governor is taking severe measures.'

I interpreted the whole matter in this way. At first Constantine had killed me by fever; but later on that story would not do, since Denny and Hogvardt and Watkins knew that it was a lie. Therefore the lie was declared a lie, and Mouraki set himself to prove that truth is better than a lie. But, by the twist of fate, it was not I who died, and the dagger of Demetri wrote another message to fill the blank sheet!

Thinking thus, I put the book in my pocket. By now we were heading straight for the harbour where the gunboat was anchored by the jetty. We drew near to the gunboat. Now I perceived that her steam-launch lay by her side and smoke poured from its funnel. Evidently the launch was ready for a voyage. Whither? Could it be to Rhodes? And did the pocket-book that I felt in my pocket contain the cargo which was to have been speeded on its way to-day?

The officer went on board the gunboat; for an hour we sat where we were. At last Mouraki's body was carried on to the gunboat; then a summons came to me. I was conducted on to the deck and found myself face to face with the captain. He was a Turk, a young man of dignified and pleasant appearance. He bowed to me courteously. I supposed that Mouraki's death left him the supreme authority in Neopalia and I approached him with proper respect.

'This is a terrible event, my lord,' said he.

'It's the loss of a very distinguished man,' I observed.

'Ah, yes, and in a fearful manner,' he answered. 'It puts you in a rather serious situation.'

I took a step towards him. I liked his looks; and somehow his grief at Mouraki's end did not seem intense. I determined to play the bold game.

'I don't know,' said I, 'whether you knew the relations between the late Pasha and myself?'

'No,' said he.

'It was not, perhaps, within the sphere of your duty to know them. But now that you're in command, it's different.'

I then gave him a short sketch of what had happened since Mouraki's arrival. He heard me with unmoved face. At last I came to my attempted escape with Phroso by the secret passage and to Constantine's attack.

'That fellow was a villain,' he observed.

'Yes,' said I. 'Read those.' And I handed him the printed slips, adding, 'I suppose he sent these by fishing boats to Rhodes, first to pave the way, and finally to account for my disappearance.'

'I must congratulate you on a lucky escape, my lord.'

'You have more than that to congratulate me on, captain. Your launch seems ready for a voyage.'

'Yes.'

'For a trip to Rhodes, perhaps?'

'I shall not deny it if you guess it.'

'By the order of the Pasha?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'To carry this perhaps?' I flung the paper which bore Mouraki's handwriting on the table.

He took it up and read it; while he read, I wrote on the blank slip of paper, which I had found in the pocket-book, the message that Mouraki's brain had surely conceived, though he had died before he could write it.

'What does all this mean?' asked the captain, as he finished reading.

'And to-morrow,' said I, 'I think another message would have gone to Rhodes—'

'I had orders to be ready to go myself to-morrow.'

'You had?' I cried. 'This is what you would have carried.' And I flung down what I had written.

He read it once and again. 'He did not write this?' he said.

'As you saw, I wrote it. If he had lived, he would have written it, as surely as I live. Captain, it was for me that Demetri's dagger was meant. Do you believe what I tell you?' I continued. 'I tried to save the girl from him, and in return he meant to kill me. Do you believe me? If not, hang me for his murder; if you do, why am I a prisoner? What have I done? Where is my offence?'

'I believe you,' he said. 'I hope soon to be able to give you your full liberty again.'

CHAPTER XX

A PUBLIC PROMISE

ON the next evening, I was once again with my friends on board the yacht. The new Governor was of a different stamp from Mouraki. He was a proud, honest gentleman, with no personal ends to serve. He had informed me that I must remain on the island till he received instructions concerning me, but he encouraged me to hope that my troubles were at last over.

Mouraki's death was greeted with general satisfaction. The soldiers regarded me with approval. To the people of Neopalia I became a hero: everybody seemed to have

learnt of my duel with the Pasha, and everybody had been (so it now appeared) on my side. The islanders fearlessly displayed their liking for me and their hatred for Mouraki's memory.

Yet there were shadows on the brightness of our fortunes. The captain, while most lenient and gracious to me, preserved a severe attitude towards Phroso. He sent her to her own house, and kept her there under guard. Her case also would be considered, he said, and he had forwarded my defence of her together with the account of Mouraki's death ; but he feared she would not be allowed to remain in the island ; she would be a centre of discontent there. If I declined to keep the island, probably a suitable lord would be selected, and Phroso would be deported.

'Where to ?' I asked.

'Really I don't know,' said the captain. 'It is but a small matter, my lord.'

As he spoke he rose to go. He had been paying us a visit on the yacht, where I had taken up my abode. At the door he paused. 'I will try to obtain lenient treatment for her,' said he, and passed out. I was left alone with Denny.

'What a happy ending it is,' he said, leaning back contentedly in his chair.

'Uncommonly,' I growled.

After this there was a long silence : I smoked, Denny whistled.

Presently Watkins opened the door of the cabin and announced the return of the captain. I was surprised to see him again so soon. I was more surprised when he came at me with outstretched hand and a smile on his face.

'My dear lord,' he exclaimed, seizing my hand, 'why did you not tell me ? I was completely in the dark. Of course I understand now : in fact, my dear lord, it quite alters the situation. As your wife, she will be in a very different position. We should have a guarantee

for her good behaviour. We should have you to look to.'

'My dear sir,' said I in exasperation, 'pray tell me what has occurred, and what it is that makes so much change.'

'A deputation of the islanders, headed by their priest, came to ask my leave for the inhabitants to go up to the house and see their Lady.'

'Yes, yes. What for?'

'To offer her their congratulations on her betrothal—'

'What?'

'And their assurances of loyalty to her and to her husband for her sake. Oh, it simplifies the matter very much.'

'Oh, does it? And did you tell them they might go?'

'Was there any objection? Certainly I told them they might go.'

I did not wait to hear more. Almost before he had finished his sentence, I was on the deck of the yacht. I leapt on to the jetty and started to run up the street at full speed. I must stop the islanders from reaching the house.

I turned the corner of the road which led to the old house. It was here I had first heard Phroso's voice in the darkness; a little further on was where I had said farewell to her when she went back, the grant of Neopalia in her hand, to soften the hearts of her turbulent countrymen; here where Mouraki had tried her with his guile, and there was the house where I had declared to the Pasha that she should be my wife.

Alas, I was too late. A large crowd was already thronging round the door of the house; and on the step of the threshold I saw her, standing there, tall and slim. With set teeth I walked on. Now someone in the circle caught sight of me. There was an eager cry, shouts, gestures; then they turned and ran to me. Before I could speak a dozen strong hands were about me. They swung me up on their shoulders and carried me along while the rest

cheered : they blessed me and called me their lord. Thus they bore me in triumph to Phroso's feet. I was indeed a hero to them, for they believed that through me their Lady would be left to them, and their island escape punishment. So they burst into a glad song, as I knelt at Phroso's feet and did not dare to lift my eyes to her face.

A sudden silence fell on them. Looking up, I saw that Phroso had raised her hand and was about to speak. Then her voice came, low but clear : ' Friends, once before, in the face of all of you, I told my love for my lord. My lord did not know that what I said was true, and I have not told him that it was true till I tell him here to-day. But you talk foolishly when you greet me as my lord's bride ; for in his country he is a great man and owns great wealth, and Neopalía is very small and poor, and I seem but a poor girl to him, though you call me your Lady.'

Here she paused ; then she went on, her voice sinking a little lower.

' Is it strange to speak thus to you, my brothers and sisters of our island ? I love to speak, for, poor as I am, I think sometimes that, had my lord come here a free man, he would have loved me. But his heart was not his own, and the lady he loves waits for him at home, and he will go to her. So wish me joy no more for what cannot be.' And then, very suddenly, she withdrew inside the threshold, and the door was closed.

Among the islanders at first there was an amazed silence, but soon voices began to be heard. I turned round and met their gaze. The strong hand of Mouraki was off them ; their fear had gone. They were in a fierce impetuous mood ; they were exasperated to find the plan which left Phroso to them brought to nothing.

' They'll take her away,' said one.

' They'll send us a stranger to rule us,' cried another.

' He shall hear the death-song then,' threatened a third.

Then a tall fellow, with flashing eyes, leapt out from the throng, crying loudly :

'Is not Mouraki dead? Why need we fear? Shall we wait idle while our Lady is taken from us? To the shore, islanders! Where is fear since Mouraki is dead?'

His words kindled their fury. In an instant they were aflame with the mad notion of attacking the soldiers and the gunboat. No voice was raised to point out the hopelessness of such an attempt, the certain death and the heavy penalties. The death-song broke out again; they were eager to march against the soldiers, and urged the tall fellow—Orestes they called him—to put himself at their head. He did not hesitate, and they drew together into a rough column. But I could not let them march to their own destruction without warning. I sprang on to the step where Phroso had stood and cried:

'You fools! The guns of the ship will mow you down before you can touch a single soldier. It's certain death.' But Orestes would not listen, and called again to them to take the road. Then the door behind me opened, and Phroso was again by my side: her eyes were wild with terror and distress.

'Stop them, my lord, stop them,' she implored.

'I'll do what I can,' I answered.

'Come,' cried Orestes, proud to be the leader, 'come, follow me, I'll lead you to victory.'

'You fools!' I groaned. 'In an hour half of you will be dead.'

No, they would not listen.

'Stop them, stop them!' prayed Phroso. 'By any means, my lord!'

'There's only one way,' said I.

'Whatever the way may be,' she urged; for now the column was facing round towards the harbour. Neopalialia was in revolt again.

There was nothing else for it; a plan was in my head and I gave it play. I could not leave these mad fools to rush to their ruin. I raised my hand, and cried: 'Hear me before you march, Neopalians, for I am your friend.'

My voice gained me a minute's silence ; the column stood still.

' You're in haste, indeed you're always in too much haste, men of Neopalia,' said I. ' But now, you are most of all in haste, for having heard what the Lady Phroso said, you have not waited to hear what I say, but have at once gone mad, all of you, and are eager to be off, leaving me here, the only sane man in the place ! For am not I sane ? Aye, sane enough not to leave the fairest lady in the world when she says she loves me ! ' I took Phroso's hand. ' For my home,' I went on, ' is a long way off, and it is long since I have seen the lady of whom you have heard ; and a man's heart will not be denied.' I kissed Phroso's hand, but I dared not look her in the face.

My meaning had dawned on them now. There was an instant's silence, then a loud shout went up from them. Again and again they shouted in joy.

Now it chanced that, at this moment, the captain, Denny and Högwardt appeared on the road, approaching the house ; and they beheld Phroso and myself side by side with the islanders standing round in high delight.

The people ran to the captain to tell the joyful news. He came up to me, and again shook my hand.

I knew very well what was in Denny's mind. His look said, ' Where is the word of a Wheatley ? ' I read his mind then more clearly than I could read my own ; for had he put to me the plain question, ' Do you mean to make her your wife, or are you playing another trick ? ' I should not have known what to answer. I had begun a trick ; the plan was to persuade the islanders into dispersing peacefully by my pretence, and then to slip away quietly myself. But was that my mind now ?

I did not know. I saw Phroso turn and go into the house again. The captain, Denny and Hogwardt also entered the house. Gradually the throng of islanders dispersed. Thus I was left alone in front of the house.

There I stood fighting the battle, for how long I do not know. The struggle within me was very sore.

As I stood, alone with my restless thoughts, I became aware of someone approaching. I saw Phroso's white dress gleaming through the gloom, and her face nearly as white above it.

The time for my decision had come; but I was not ready.

CHAPTER XXI

RELEASE

SHE came to me swiftly and without hesitation. 'My lord,' she said, 'I must ask one thing of you. After to-day I dare not be here when my countrymen learn how they are deceived. I should be ashamed to face them. Will you take me with you to Athens, or to some other port from which I can reach Athens? I shall be no trouble: you need only tell me when your boat will start, and give me a corner to live in on board. Indeed I grieve to ask this of you, but my trouble is great and—What is it, my lord?'

I had moved my hand to stop her. 'When your countrymen learn how they are deceived?' said I, repeating her words. 'Deceived by what?'

'By the trick we played on them, my lord, to—persuade them to disperse.'

I took a step towards her, and my voice shook as I said: 'Was it all a trick, Phroso? Was it a trick to-day, and a trick on St. Tryphon's day also?'

She gave one startled glance at my face, and then her eyes dropped to the ground. She made no answer to my question.

‘ Was it all a trick, Phroso ? ’ I asked in entreaty.

‘ Ah, my lord, must you hear it again ? ’ she answered. ‘ Am I not twice shamed already ? ’

But I saw the light of gladness in her eyes and I whispered : ‘ Let me hear it a thousand times ! ’

‘ But, my lord ! ’ she murmured. Then she returned to her request. ‘ You won’t leave me here, will you ? You’ll take me somewhere where I can be safe ? ’

I took no notice of the request. ‘ I want to hear it again,’ I said. For now my resolve was made. Were it right or wrong, I could not let her go.

But hark ! There was a cry, and the sound of footsteps. Denny’s voice shouted my name loudly and eagerly. Phroso drew back into the deepest shadow.

‘ I’ll be back soon,’ I whispered, and, leaving her, I stepped out in front of the house.

Denny was on the doorstep. ‘ You must come upstairs,’ he said. ‘ It’s important ; the captain is waiting for you.’ He turned and ran rapidly through the hall and up the stairs, I following.

Denny led the way into the room Mouraki had used. The captain sat at the table examining a mass of papers. He looked up when I entered. ‘ These are the late Pasha’s papers,’ he said. ‘ The Government of the island having passed to me, it was my duty to inspect them. Among them I discovered a letter addressed to—’

‘ Me ? ’ and I sprang forward.

‘ No, to your cousin, to this gentleman. I am not warranted in letting it out of my hands. I have, however, allowed Mr. Swinton to read it. He says that it concerns you, Lord Wheatley, more than himself. I therefore propose to ask him to read it to you in my presence.’ With this he handed an envelope to Denny.

‘ For Heaven’s sake be quick about it, my dear boy ! ’ I cried.

Denny took the letter from its envelope and read :

‘ London, May 21st ’—then he paused and remarked, ‘ We got here on the seventh, you know.’ I nodded

hastily, and he began to read the letter. 'My dear Denny'—then he broke off. 'It's a long, confused letter, Charley,' he said; 'you'll get the news more quickly if I put it in my own words. The letter's from Beatrice Hipgrave. When she wrote, she'd just read in the newspaper about your death from fever. She says she was terribly distressed about it, and is afraid her mother's letter, coming during your illness, must have made you very unhappy.'

'Her mother's letter?' I interrupted, completely bewildered by all this.

'Yes, a letter in which her mother told you that Beatrice had broken off her engagement to you, and was going to marry Bennett Hamlyn.'

'But I've had no letter from Beatrice's mother,' I said.

'No, but perhaps Mouraki had one.'

'All letters,' observed the captain, 'would pass through his hands, if he chose to make them.'

'Depend upon it, he had it,' said Denny.

A sudden recollection flashed across me, the remembrance of the amused smile with which Mouraki had spoken of the lady who was most anxious about me and my future wife. He must have known then; he must even then have had Mrs. Hipgrave's letter in his possession. He had played a deliberate trick on me by suppressing the letter. At that moment, when I thought of the struggle he had caused to me and the pain to Phroso, I envied Demetri that his had been the hand to kill Mouraki.

But that feeling soon passed. I thought of Phroso waiting for me below. I excused myself to the captain, told Denny I would see him later, and got out of the room as quickly as I decently could.

I darted down the stairs. I would speak the decisive words to Phroso now. I was free to speak them now. I passed out through the door. Phroso was there waiting for me.

'Phroso,' I said, 'the lady who waits over the sea—' I could not help laughing.

‘ You laugh ! ’ murmured Phroso, in wonder.

‘ I’m happy, Phroso, so I may laugh. The lady who waited over the sea, Phroso, waits no longer.’

Phroso’s eyes opened wide in amazement. ‘ She waits no longer ? My lord, she is dead ? ’

‘ On the contrary she thinks that I am. Constantine spread news of my death. He said that I died of fever.’

‘ And she believes it ? ’

‘ She does, Phroso ; but before she thought I was dead, she had made up her mind to wait no longer.’

‘ To wait no longer ? What do you mean ? ’ Her voice sounded half-stifled.

‘ I am free. She has given me my freedom. She loves me no longer.’

‘ Oh, but, my lord, it is impossible.’

‘ Phroso, it is true—true that I can come to you now.’

She understood at last. For a moment she was silent, and I, silent also, pierced through the darkness to her wondering face. Once she stretched out her arms ; then there came a little, low laugh, and she put her hands together, and thrust them, thus clasped, between mine that closed on them.

‘ My lord, my lord ! ’ said Phroso.

I put my arm round Phroso, and thus at last together we stood while night lay silent over the island.

‘ Ah, the dear island ! ’ said Phroso softly. ‘ You won’t take me away from it for ever ? It is my lord’s island now, and it will be faithful to him, even as I myself.’

* * *

I must now pass over a year, but the scene is still the island I loved. I returned with Phroso to Neopalia the following spring, after our marriage in England, leaving Denny inconsolable behind, but accompanied by old Hogvardt and Watkins. We landed this time to meet no threatening looks : there were only smiles and friendly greetings to welcome us when we entered the old grey house on the hill looking over the blue waters. I do not

know whether I shall live to regret the new-born tranquillity of Neopalía. I love to look back to the early stormy days. Even now, when the wild doings of the purchaser of Neopalía grow golden in distant memory, I like to walk to the end of the secret underground passage and recall all that it has seen.

QUESTIONS

CHAPTER I

1. What do you know about Neopalia? What did the Turkish Ambassador tell Lord Wheatley?
2. What happened in the restaurant when Lord Wheatley was dining there with Denny?

CHAPTER II

3. Who was Vlacho? What did he say to Lord Wheatley?
4. What happened after Lord Wheatley and his companions left the inn?

CHAPTER III

5. What was meant by 'the fever of Neopalia'?
6. Give briefly the old woman's account of how the lord of Neopalia met his death.

CHAPTER IV

7. Describe the attempt to steal the sheep.
8. How did Lord Wheatley discover that his prisoner was the Lady Euphrosyne?

CHAPTER V

9. What did Lord Wheatley see and hear when he went to the cottage?
10. Describe how Lord Wheatley was discovered at the cottage, and what happened after that until the Lady Euphrosyne overheard his conversation with his friends.

CHAPTER VI

11. What events were recorded in the book Denny found ?

12. Why was Lord Wheatley eager to discover the secret of the Stefanopouloi ?

CHAPTER VII

13. How did Lord Wheatley discover ' the secret ' ?

14. What did Phroso show Lord Wheatley in the underground passage ?

CHAPTER VIII

15. How were Phroso and Lord Wheatley separated from their friends ?

16. Why did Lord Wheatley give the island to Phroso ? What did he intend to do when she had left him ?

CHAPTER IX

17. Describe the events from Lord Wheatley's reaching the cottage to his discovery by Vlacho.

18. Why did Madame Stefanopoulos call for help ?

CHAPTER X

19. How was Constantine forced to admit that he killed the old lord ?

20. How did Phroso save Lord Wheatley from death ?

CHAPTER XI

21. Why did Demetri cease to side with Constantine ?

22. What events did Demetri reveal ?

CHAPTER XII

23. Why did Mouraki come to Neopalía earlier than he intended ?

24. What effect did his arrival have upon the islanders ?

CHAPTER XIII

25. Kortes urged Lord Wheatley to declare his love to Phroso. What prevented Lord Wheatley from doing so?

26. What was the surprise Mouraki gave to Lord Wheatley, in Phroso's presence?

CHAPTER XIV

27. What was the plan arranged between Lord Wheatley and Kortes?

28. How did Mouraki receive Lord Wheatley's announcement that he and Phroso were to be married?

CHAPTER XV

29. Do you think Mouraki had allowed Constantine to escape from prison?

30. How did Mouraki deprive Lord Wheatley of the yacht? Why was its departure a serious matter for Wheatley?

CHAPTER XVI

31. What did Lord Wheatley and Mouraki find at the cottage?

32. What was the meaning of the message that Madame Stefanopoulos had written?

CHAPTER XVII

33. Describe Constantine's reappearance and his death.

34. What happened to Phroso and Lord Wheatley when they reached the end of the passage?

CHAPTER XVIII

35. Why did Mouraki give Lord Wheatley the chance of escaping through the passage?

36. What was Demetri's reason for killing the Pasha?

CHAPTER XIX

37. What did Lord Wheatley find in Mouraki's pocket-book ?

38. What was the final message Mouraki intended to send to Rhodes ?

CHAPTER XX

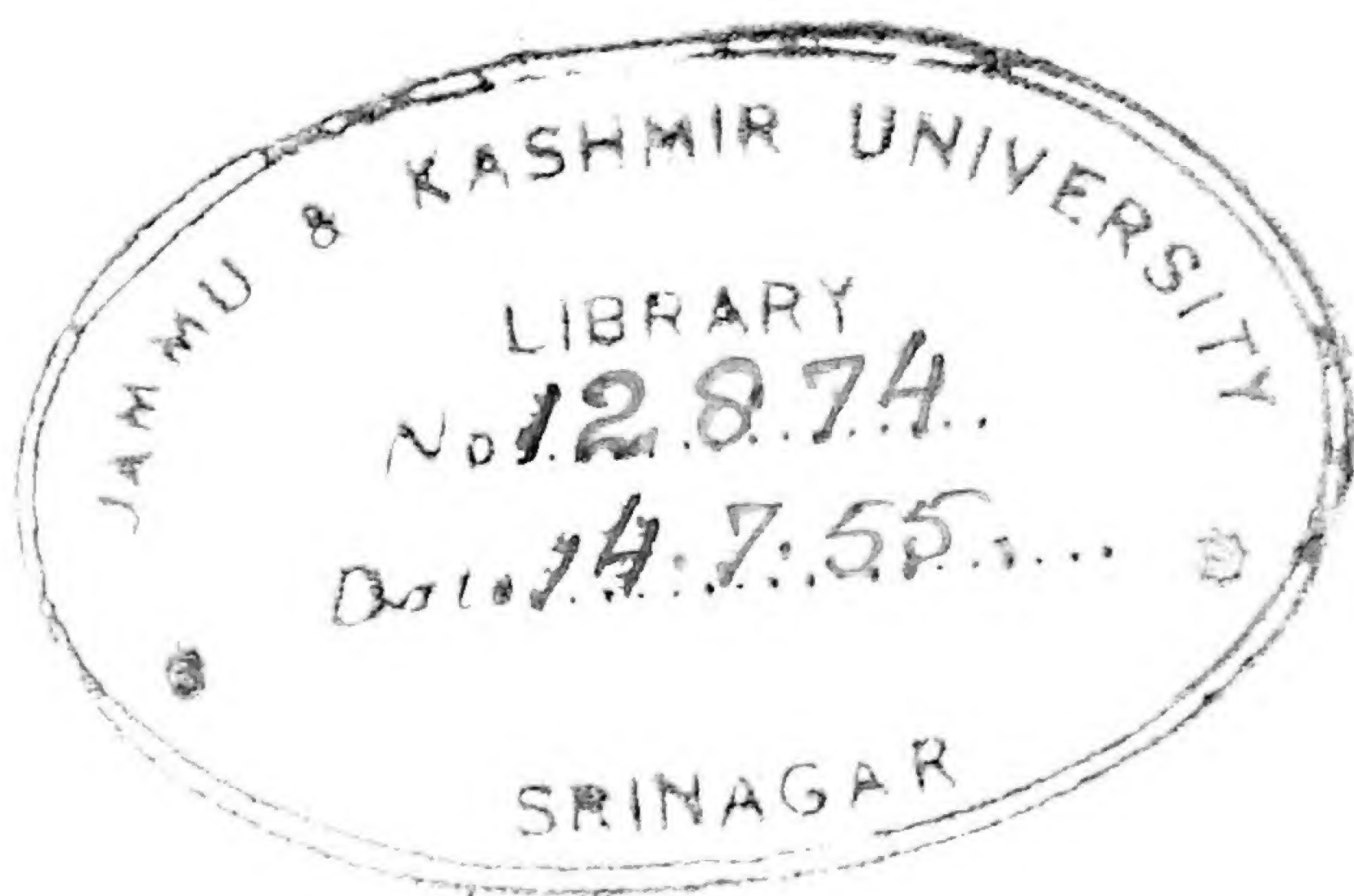
39. What was the surprising news that the new Governor brought to Lord Wheatley ?

40. How did Lord Wheatley stop the islanders from attempting a rebellion ?

CHAPTER XXI

41. What was the news Denny was able to give to Lord Wheatley ?

42. What difference did the news make to Lord Wheatley's future ?



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